THE SWORD OF AZRAEL

A CHRONICLE OF THE GREAT MUTINY

BY

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THE SWORD OF AZRAEL

CHAPTER I

MUTINY

MY experiences in the Indian Mutiny divide themselves into two parts, of which the first, the earlier, had a terrible, a tragic distinctness. Of it I write.

In the relief of the winter of 1856–7 the regiment of Native Infantry to which I belonged—known as Lindsay's, after the name of the man who had raised it, just after Plassey, a hundred years before—was transferred from Bengal to the North-West Provinces, to a station lying in the tract between the rivers Ganges and Jumna, the tract in which, and in the adjoining province of Oudh, the Mutiny blazed fiercest and wrought its utmost havoc.

We reached our new cantonment in the month of February, 1857. In the same month was the beginning of the Mutiny, of that bloodshedding which was soon to incarnadine the land. The sepoys declared what they considered to be the cause of their revolt by their acts. They refused, no matter at what cost, even of life, to use the new cartridges, the introduction of which was necessitated by the proposed substitution of the new weapon, the rifle, for the musket, for old Brown Bess, whose work was ended—not a bad work, considering that it included the Peninsular battles, Waterloo, and the conquest of India. The sepoy could not put them to his lips—it was necessary to bite off the ends in using them—without the loss of what was dearer to him than life, his caste: without a pollution which meant the most horrible self-loathing, social ostracism, eternal perdition; for the cartridges were smeared with the

fat of pigs and cows, he said. The Government was seeking to Christianise them. It could not do so by persuasion and argument; it sought to do so by fraud and force; and what device more cunning and devilish than this one which set their military obedience, breach of which meant death, in antagonism to their caste?

The outbreak was subdued. It had given us much concern, not with reference to ourselves or the empire at large—we had no thought it was likely to affect either—but with reference to our brother officers of the two mutinous regiments: some of them were sure to suffer. Regiments had mutinied before, and the officers had always suffered, most when the bungling was really at headquarters, as we considered to be the case now, when the criminal ignorance, or apathy, of someone in authority had set the loyalty of the sepoy against his faith.

But the affair was over. Our attention was soon wholly engaged in settling down in our new houses; in receiving and returning hospitality; in making new, or renewing old, acquaintances; in quail-shooting, antelope-shooting, pig-sticking; with our racquets and billiards and the bath and the band; with making our arrangements for the coming hot weather.

Then came the outbreak at Delhi with its slaughter. Then came the loss of Delhi, the ancient capital, the resumption of active sovereignty by its monarch. Then came the flood. Then began the six months of sorrow and woe, of mourning, of fierce excitement, of horror, of terrible suspense; each day might bring the news of some fresh disaster, some fresh blow to our power, the sweeping away of another English community.

We had dwelt as princes in the land. We had established in it a security of person and property such as was never known in it before, and which in our own case was absolute. We lived with open doors; went safe where we listed. English women and their children travelled over thousands of miles attended by natives alone, borne on their shoulders. A divinity hedged us round. Our rule in the land was absolute. Our word was law.

Now what a change! The prestige of our name had fled. The sphere of our influence was confined to the reach of our

arms. We were strictly confined within the limits of our station. Our white faces marked us out for destruction. Our high civil functionaries dared not venture out into the neighbouring district through which but a few weeks before they had made royal progress. The sudden downfall of the system of government we had so laboriously built up, and, as we thought, in the interests of the people, is the event of the time to be most deeply pondered.

I must now give such particulars regarding myself as seem to bear on the narrative.

I had passed into the service from Addiscombe. I was then six-and-twenty. We grow shorter with age; I am now a little under five foot ten; I was then a little over it. I was broad-shouldered, with a peculiar depth of chest, which made me a strong swimmer; lean in the flanks and carrying no superfluous flesh, a great advantage in the coming time when obesity cost many a man his life. I was fond of all field sports, but I was a better shot with rifle than with gun. This was due to a certain heaviness, or want of nimbleness, of temperament. This prevented also my having my knowledge at ready command, so that I came out only in Infantry, though I came out not far from the top.* I was fairly good at most things, especially mathematics, in class, but not so good in the examinations. That slowness of temperament was against me at single-stick, of which I was fond; in my favour in boxing, of which we had a good deal in those days: I could stand having the worst of it for so long that I generally won in the end. And so in the battle of life: I was able to stand its adverse blows better than men of a more lively temperament. If I have never been so elated as they, I have never been so cast down. If the lack of the more sensitive nervous organisation, as of the higher mental powers which it accompanies, has prevented me from achieving any very brilliant success in life, it has kept me from those disastrous, and in their case so sad, failures to which the possession of those finer and more dangerous gifts often renders their possessors liable. I have been in all things—stature, birth,

* In the East India Company's Military College at Addiscombe the cadets passed into the Cavalry, Infantry, Artillery, or Engineers, according to their position in the final examination.—R. E. F.

intellect—of the middle sort: neither dwarf nor giant, neither aristocrat nor plebeian, neither a fool nor a genius. I am not thanking God that I was not born a genius, but that high estate has its drawbacks as mediocrity has its compensations.

In this connection I may be allowed to mention that I was born and bred in the Church of England, which, for me, holds the rightful mean between the Churches of Rome and Geneva.

I was young, strong, healthy, happy. I had sufficient means, a good house standing in its own grounds, plenty of servants, horses, dogs, vehicles. I was the member of a gay and honourable profession, which might open the way to wealth and distinction, through its own channel or that of civil employ. It was satisfactory to feel, even then, that the Service made ample provision for one's old age; to think of the pension, not only for oneself but for the hoped-for wife and children. My social position was of the best. I was a member of the governing class, of the ruling race; I had around me a most pleasant, friendly society, composed largely of old school and college mates, relations and connections. The members of the "Services" were mostly kith and kin, people with common interests and associations, common memories, common social training and instincts. One had command of the finest shooting in the world. There were the bad seasons of the "hot weather" and "the rains," but there was the supremely good season of the "cold weather."

Great the honour of serving the Queen, but we felt a separate and distinctive pride in the service of the Company that had conquered and now governed the great Peninsula. We felt a sense of largeness. We felt the Roman pride of rule.

Above all, and beyond all, I had the hope that upon the pathway of my life had begun to shine the radiance of the star of love.

Our situation was this. The small station of Afzalnagar lay in the flat, open plain by the side of a small native town, of greater importance once as standing by the then imperial highway. There were the usual sources of danger in the Treasury, with its accumulation of coin; in the Jail, with its accumulation of ruffianry; in the predatory tribes and fallen

noblemen of the neighbourhood, the mob of the town—which, as its name indicated, was a Mahomedan one; in our want of any defensive posts; in the scattered bungalows with their innumerable doorways and thatched roofs, whose utterly defenceless character showed how profound was our belief in the security of our rule. There was the usual source of weakness and danger and anxiety in the presence of a large number of women and children—English and Eurasian. The troops in the place were my own regiment, a bullock-battery of light guns, and six squadrons of Irregular Cavalry, whose help the magistrate asked for from one of our new stations in Oudh. With this compact little force we hoped to be able to hold our own against the armed levies of the neighbouring discontented landowners, the ruffianry of the town, the criminals of the jail, should they rise up and be let loose and combine against us. But soon we had reason to doubt the fidelity of the men of the Cavalry, and also of the artillerymen, who, of course, were natives. We had the fullest trust in our own men. Our regiment had nearly a century's record of good and faithful service: was commanded by an officer of distinction, beloved of his men.

It is possible that the regiment might never have mutinied but for the unfortunate occurrences in a neighbouring station. I do not know for how long the regiment might have been able to withstand, elsewhere, the influences, good as well as bad, creditable as well as discreditable, that caused the sepoys to mutiny; but had it not mutinied here for another few days it would not have mutinied at all, for at the end of those few days the English troops had arrived. The men themselves attributed their sudden, phrensied outbreak to those occurrences. The news came to us of the mutiny of the native regiments at that neighbouring station, of its "vigorous" suppression. Our men declared that that "vigorous" suppression meant that their fellow-soldiers, their co-religionists, their fellow-countrymen had been wrongfully suspected, treacherously disarmed, and then attacked and slaughtered and driven out of the place; that grape-shot had been poured into a body of innocent, unarmed men. And the official record shows, clearly if grudgingly, that there were grounds for the sudden feeling of rage and horror and indignation by which our men

stated themselves to have been overcome: "The affair," of disarming those regiments, "was much mismanaged; was done hurriedly and not judiciously"; men were "drawn into resistance" who, "had they been properly dealt with," would "have remained faithful"; and in the record is the plain declaration of the officer commanding one of the regiments that it had been "foully used." I have to dwell on this matter because the sun of our regiment, which had shone so brilliantly for a hundred years, went down in a sea of blood; because the treacherous and ruthless massacre of our officers by our own men stands out among the black deeds of the time; the latter declared it was the reprisal for the treacherous and ruthless massacre of their brethren.

Those driven-out regiments were now on their way to Delhi. They would pass near Afzalnagar, on the other side of the Ganges, from which Afzalnagar stood about two miles inland. Would they go straight on their way or turn and come to Afzalnagar? The road of approach crossed the Ganges by a bridge of boats. It was determined to anticipate their coming by sending down to the bridge of boats a company of my regiment with two guns, while a squadron of the Irregular Cavalry was placed at a point on the road higher up, where a track from a ferry, at which also they might cross, ran into the road. It was hoped by these dispositions to elbow them off, keep them on their unobstructed onward way. The company sent was my own. I was a subaltern in it. I had had seven years' service, but promotion had been slow; it was soon to be accelerated.

And so I parted from my house and my cherished belongings, my memorials of home and college life, my books, my guns, my trophies of the chase, and some letters for which, now, I would give much gold. And so began that episode in my life, separate, distinct, and woefully complete, of which I proceed to rewrite, rearrange the simple record.

CHAPTER II

A RUN FOR LIFE

WE marched at sudden notice late in the afternoon. We marched without tents; they were to follow. We bivouacked in the open. We slept on the ground. The night was more than usually clear. There seemed a special effulgence in the stars; they shone grandly in the heavens; they kept their old watch in the sky. The lying on the ground was unwonted, but not the sleeping out. I had been doing so, as was my custom at this season of the year, for some time past. For many a week back the universe had been my wide bedchamber, the heavens my gorgeous canopy. There hung they, the lamps of heaven, raining down their sacred influence, felt to-night more than ever before. In this time of danger my thoughts were lifted up more than ever. The earthly emotions, too, were quickened. More deeply than ever was that new, strong emotion stirred within me. Was the deep longing that had been awakened within me never to be satisfied? Were she and I, whose spirits had begun to approach, to wander apart through all eternity? Would the morrow bring an end of love and life? Well was it that she was not here, but in a quiet, remote station which had not the dangerous protection of sepoy troops. Whatever hap to me, ye heavens be kind to her. My thoughts went back more than ever to the dear ones far away—my mother, my sisters. I thought of my school-days, my dear, delightful time at Addiscombe—oh to hear the reveillé once again! I thought of the present. Here was my first chance of service. Would it bring distinction or death? I gazed up at the stars. Mysterious orbs! it may be that my spirit will be sent wandering among you soon—where to rest?

Cavalry. They pull up with a crash in front of our men in the road.

"You have heard what has happened at Tulsipore?" they shout. It was from Tulsipore that the two mutinous regiments had been driven out with slaughter.

"We have heard what has happened at Tulsipore," our men and the artillerymen shout.

"Slay them! slay them!"

Poor Potter is down, and his riderless horse is galloping wildly along the road back to the station. We are enveloped in the swaying mass of sepoys. There are shouts and yells and cries and the sound of firearms. Now I am in the middle of a compact throng of sepoys, its close compactness my salvation. Then I am at the edge of it. I am warding off blows with the stick I have in my hand. I jump aside from a levelled musket. I am running along the road towards the bridge of boats with the bullets whistling past me, two of the troopers with their drawn swords in their hands galloping after me. They say one gets out of the way of running in India, one rides and drives so much; but I ran then as hard as ever I ran in my life. But I cannot run faster than the horses. They are upon me. I jink, to the right. They rush on. I dash along the path I had strolled upon that morning. They have recovered and are after me. I am running along the top of the bank just above the alligator pool. If I can get down to the ferry and jump into one of the boats I had seen there this morning, and push off into the stream, I am safe. But one man has made a détour and headed me, the other is close behind me. There is but one thing to be done. I must take to the water. My worst nightmare had been feeling leg or arm embedded in the terrible gin of an alligator's mouth, and being dragged helplessly through the water. But better that than give them the satisfaction of killing me. I rush down the bank, plunge into the pool, and begin to swim across. They cannot bring their horses down the bank. They pull up at the edge and fire at me with their carbines. The bullets splash in the water close about me. Meant for my destruction they were probably my salvation. They keep the dread alligators off. At all events I reach the opposite edge of the pool without injury from man or brute. A tamarisk brake is near. I dash into it. The

horsemen ride away. I force my way through the tamarisk brake—no easy task, sometimes it is difficult to get through, sometimes the light branches slash like whips—to its opposite edge. I peer out cautiously. The troopers may have gone back the short way to the camp, got together some sepoys, crossed the bridge of boats, and come down to search the brake. But I see no one. And my best ally is near—the darkness. It comes to my help fast. I leave the brake under cover of it and make for the high valley bank. I pass, with painful feet, over the loose sand, over the stony clods, over the sharp roots of the cut-down rushes in the dry morass. I have reached the bank at a place where it presents a sandy slope. I clamber up. I sink down at the top. Lindsay's has mutinied.

CHAPTER III

THE SHRINE IN THE FOREST

I AROUSE myself. I must get back to the station. But I am now on the opposite side of the river. I cannot cross by the bridge of boats; I must make my way to the village which I had noted as marking this end of the ferry, and in which the lights have begun to twinkle. I make for it direct, along the bank; but this is so cut up by ravines that my progress is very slow. At last I am brought to a complete standstill. I must strike inland, to get clear of the ravines, then make for the village. I pass up through the bare, denuded strip along the valley edge. I come to fields. A road, a fire burning on the ground by the side of it. No one near it. They who made it have gone on. The road must lead to the village. There it looms. I have gone a little way along the track when I hear the sound of approaching footsteps. I step a little off the road. Three men, with packs on their backs: traders.

"Ho, sirs!" I call.

"*Arreh!*" "*Arreh!*" Two similar startled exclamations of surprise.

"*Hynh!*" A third voice, a more quiet one.

"What is it?" "What is it?" The first two voices, so curiously alike.

"It came from off the road." The third voice, different, younger.

"Ho, wayfarers!" I call again.

"A ghost!" "A spirit!" cry the two voices, consonant.

"A Feringhee!" exclaims the third.

"Yes; a sahib," I call out.

"Let us hurry on!" "Quickly!" cry the voices of the two old men.

"Let us see what he wants," cries the voice of the younger man.

"I want to know if this road will take me to the village above the ferry."

"Yes; that way," "That way," cry the two similar voices, quickly.

"Go not there," said the third one, distinctive.

"Guard thy boyish tongue!" "Curb thy youthful impetuosity!" cry the two.

"I must warn him," says the third.

"I wish to get back to Afzalnagar," I say.

"That will mean death," says the third voice.

"This boyish interference in the affairs of others!" "This youthful meddling with what does not concern him!" exclaim the other two.

"Why?" I ask, as I turn and move along by the side of the road, parallel with the men.

"Because all the English people have been killed there," says the man with the fuller voice; the other two were very thin.

"How? The sepoy regiment—Lindsay's regiment?"

"Mutinied. Slew all the English officers. Joined with the ball-throwers (gunners), and the cavalrymen, and the evil-livers of the town; sacked the station; slew all the Christian people; plundered the Government treasury."

I reeled as I walked.

"What have we to do with what has happened in the station?" "Or with people by the side of the road?" cry the two old men, the two old voices.

"Whence come you, sir?" asks the third man.

"I belonged to the regiment. I was with the company at the bridge."

"It mutinied?"

"Yes—I escaped across the river."

"The evil-doers——"

"Stop thy boyish chatter!" snaps one of the old men, and

> "Who would not be in evil case,
> Should keep shut mouth in open place,"

says the other, using a well-known proverb of the land.

"How foolish is youth!"

"Discretion comes only with years."

We have reached the high blazing fire, and as the others come within its radiance I am surprised to find that while two are very old men, the third is an old man too.

"Let us sit down and have a smoke," says one of the very old ones. They put down their packs. They sit down near the fire, side by side, two old men with hooked noses and long white beards. I step up to the other one, who has remained standing, and say to him, "What should I do?"

"Come with us, sir."

"What!" "What!" squeak out the other two.

"Not to our village, sir; you would not be safe there; but a little further on, to where a road goes off to Chandpore, the *garhi* (fortified dwelling-place—fort) of Newal Kishore, a Hindoo zemindar. It is only three miles off. You will find protection there."

Protection! Forced to seek for protection! And our commonest title was "Protectors"!

"If you will come on with me, sir, I will show you the turning while my uncles rest and smoke."

"The foolish boy!" "The thoughtless youth!" exclaim the two.

When we had gone a little way, "Your uncles?" I say.

"Yes, sir."

"How wonderfully alike!"

"Yes, sir. They are twins."

"Their voices too."

"Yes. It has been a matter of great amusement in our village, that exact similarity."

When we come to the turning, to the right, and therefore away from the direction of the bridge of boats, he comes a little way down the branch road with me. Then he stops, and says—

"A man has not hoofs, sir."

"Certainly not," say I, surprised.

"Nor claws."

"Why, of course not."

"Nor horns."

"No."

"Without something in the hand he is powerless. You are empty-handed."

"I am so."

I had lost my stick in the river.

"Take this *lathee*," holding out the bamboo club he carried.

"It is a very costly one."

Besides being heavily shod with iron, it was elaborately bound round with an interlacing of brass wire.

"It is; that is why I came with you. My uncles would have objected to my parting with it; talked of my boyish folly," and he laughed.

"From the way they talked I was surprised to see your grey hair and beard. I expected to see a lad, a very young man."

He laughed again.

"They brought me up, sir. They have always looked on me as a boy; will do so to the end."

"Infinite thanksgiving," say I, as he hands me the club.

"Thieves and robbers and men of violence will be abroad to-night, sir, and you will have to pass through a jungle in which there are wolves and leopards; it may be of use to you. You can face a man with a sword with it; you could kill a wolf with one stroke of it."

"Thanksgiving infinite," I repeat.

"Welcome," he says.

"I can give you nothing but thanks now, but my name is Hayman."

"Amen."

"John Hayman."

"Jān Amen."

"Let me hear from you when this commotion is ended."

"Soon may that be."

"Any English gentleman will be able to inform you where I am."

"Keep on this track; take no other. And now, sahib, salâam."

"Salâam," I say, and I move forward, and he goes back.

For a little while I have him and his uncles, the two old dotards, in my mind. Then the thought of what I had seen, of what I had been told, comes upon me in a flood, to the

sweeping away of every other. The horrors of that Devils' or Witches' Sabbath at Meerut, when took place the first volcanic outburst of the Mutiny, were fresh in my mind. They would be repeated here. In worse form. There they had been partial, here they would be universal; there they had involved a few, here they would involve all. The dear, sweet women with whom I had been familiar for so many years. The dear children who had given me their hearts, and taken mine. My brother officers, my old college mates, my faithful companions and dear friends. I walk on unheeding, unobserving, unseeing. A sudden dense darkness. I had been on an open plain. Above a thick canopy of leaves. I have passed into a forest. But the stars shine bright, there ought to be some light on the broad cart-track. I look down. This is not a wide cart-track, but a narrow footpath; no cart could pass along here. I have got off the track. Where? When? How? I know not. How am I to regain it? Only by retracing my steps. But how far back will that take me? I move on a little farther. The darkness grows even more dense; black, palpable, solid. I stand still. I am helpless because of the darkness. An animal could approach me unseen. I hear noises about me. In any case it is no use going on in an unknown direction. The path may wind round to the cart-track. But it may not. I must retrace my steps. As I turn a gleam of light catches my eye. It must be from the fire of some wood-cutters, or charcoal-burners, passing the night in the forest. It seemed straight ahead of me. I turn back, move on, feeling my way with the club. I feel glad I am not empty-handed. Now, for some distance, the trees are lighter-foliaged, stand further apart, and I move through a twilight gloom—can see my way; but then again comes the darkness, dense, profound. I come to a standstill in the palpable blackness. Then a sudden stream of light; twisted roots and gnarled and buttressed stems, trees and bushes, stand out with a flash. They disappear with a flash. The illumining gleam has vanished, as suddenly as it came. It seems strange. I have not stirred. It cannot come from a fixed point. There it is again, a dancing, wavering gleam. Now I see the source of it, now it abides; now the steady red glare runs streaming down a long open glade; it comes from a torch, borne at the

head of a body of men on foot, moving down the glade, moving straight towards me. They are not coming along the pathway on which I stand; there is no path in the glade; they walk over the open sward. That, somehow, makes me think that I had better see what they are like before hailing them. I step off the pathway, get in among some bushes standing under a group of huge trees near. Moving down the glade; now they are very near! I slip behind the thick trunk of one of the trees. They pass within a few yards of me. The light of the torch, now held up high, falls full on the face and person of the man carrying it; on broad, hairy chest; on hollow stomach; on brawny, hairy thighs—his only clothing a narrow strip of cloth between his legs; on his head, which, unlike those of the others, is bare, and across whose shaven crown runs a long clean scar, evidently that of a sword-cut; on his villainous, one-eyed countenance. Behind him come five other men, one of whom carries a faggot of wood, the others baskets and various-shaped vessels of earthenware. Bare of foot they move silent as ghosts. But they vanish not like ghosts. They pull up a short way off, to my dismay; the disquiet awakened by the sight of the ugly, evil, ferocious countenance of the torch-bearer, by the scar on his head, was not allayed by the looks of his companions.

They are not wood-cutters, the bundle of sticks notwithstanding. Their looks and bearing assign them rather to one of those criminal organisations so rank in India. They lay the faggot, and the earthenware vessels, and the baskets, carefully down on the ground. The torch-bearer moves a little way further on and places the torch in a hole in the root of a tree. The flaring light shows it a peepul tree, the sacred fig tree, much worshipped, demon-haunted.

Beneath it stands a shrine of the goddess Kali. Flares out in high relief, strongly coloured, the hideous image of the terrible goddess. A jet-black woman standing on the prostrate body of a man—he is her husband—one foot planted, with full weight, on his stomach, the other strained back on his thigh; her black hair flowing down to the ground; her eyes furiously red, as if she were drunken with blood, she is the "goddess of blood," which has flowed in torrents before her shrine; her long, protruded tongue running with blood which

drips down on to her breast; in one of her four hands a scimitar, in another the gory head of a giant; her necklace of human skulls; the girdle round her waist of severed human hands. I had found the image, when seen before, repulsive, disgusting, saddening, ludicrous; had viewed it with feelings of horror and shame and fierce indignation; seen now, at this hour, under these circumstances, it inspires me with a feeling of awe, dead stone image though it be.

The men then gather twigs and branches and bits of wood and light a fire. I wonder they do not make use of the faggot. In gathering the materials they come very near my lurking-place. Should they hear my breathing, should I break a twig! A sudden terrible dissonance. Disturbed peafowl utter harsh cries; disturbed monkeys jabber and hoot. The dissonance is as music in my ear. When the flames of the fire rise up full and strong the torch is extinguished. The men squat down by the fire, their faces toward the image, all but one who remains standing. I see, by the sacred thread, that he is a Brahmin. He removes his skull-cap. He proceeds to the rites of worship which I have witnessed before; makes the "meat-offerings" and the "drink-offerings"; takes from the little baskets some leaf platters and puts on them various articles of food—unleavened cakes, lentil porridge, lumps of coarse sugar, curds; lays them reverently before the goddess, doing the same with two little earthen pots, one of which probably contains milk, the other, the far-reaching reek tells it, contains the potent arrack; pours some water into the hollow of his right hand, takes a sip, repeats an incantation three times, pours off the water slowly—it is an oblation; joins together the thumb and forefinger of his right hand—both, I know, have their special significance—and touches with them his head, the seat of thought, his nose, his eyes, his ears, the avenues of the senses, his breast, and either shoulder, muttering some words each time; took some water, washed his hands, made some passes with them in the air, repeated another incantation, struck the earth three times with his left heel. "He will now present the offerings again," I think. But instead of this he stoops down and takes a knife out of one of the baskets. What! is he about to perform the bloody sacrifice? My heart stands still, not only at the thought that I am about to behold

the terrible rite of human sacrifice, but because I know that I myself would form the most desirable victim, the most acceptable sacrifice, and I see no other. Have they become aware of my presence? I tremble. I stand very still.

Then, to my intense relief, I become aware that the sacrifice of blood is to be performed in the minor degree. Advancing up to the image, the hierophant gashes a finger, and lets the blood from it drop on to the red extended tongue of the image, repeating at the same time an incantation. He binds up his finger with a bit of rag. While he is doing so two of the men untwist the withes of the faggot. Is it to build the fire higher? No! as they separate the sticks there fall from among them to the ground knives, daggers, and then with a thud a huge crowbar. I understand now. This was the "jumper" with which a certain class of burglars bore their way into houses. The Brahmin is now making formal presentation of the offerings to the goddess, waving his hands from them to her. This done a man carries the iron bar, holding it reverently on the open, extended palms of his two hands, to the Brahmin, who receives it reverently on his open, extended hands, and presents it to the goddess, and this ends the ceremony.

The men then proceed to make a meal on the offerings; the faggot is made up again—the knives and daggers and iron bar being concealed in it as before; the torch is re-fed with oil, re-lighted; they are gone, back up the glade, into the forest beyond, into the darkness. I remain still for a while; then move back to the pathway, and begin to retrace my steps along it, slowly in the darkness of the wood; I shall be able to go faster when I get out of it. I am nearing the forest edge when I hear the jingling of bells, quickly getting louder, rapidly coming nearer and nearer. Joyous sound! It indicates, I know, the approach of a hurkaru, a letter-carrier. Now I see the man coming trotting up the pathway, in one hand a small torch, while the other steadies the bamboo pole resting across his shoulder from the ends of which depend the pair of leather bags. Along the bamboo pole hang the tinkling bells, their purpose to keep off wild beasts, to clear a way for him, the privileged messenger, in crowded street or road. I call out "Ho!" "*Henh!*" he exclaims, pulling up dead.

"Who is it?" he calls out.

"A sahib."

"A sahib!" he exclaims, as he raises his torch to survey me. "How here?"

"I was proceeding to the *garhi* of the zemindar Newal Kishore, and have lost my way."

"You are on it."

"How? I was coming along a cart-track and deviated into this forest path."

"It is a shorter cut to the zemindar's village, to Chandpore. I pass by the village, leave some letters there."

"Are you a Government servant?"

"No; in private employ. The village is not far off; I can go slowly with you up to it."

We are in the dense forest for a while, then emerge on to the void open plain, then come to a cultivated tract, where dense black masses indicate the position of mango groves and villages.

"That is the one," says the hurkaru, "to the right, with the lights twinkling."

We are challenged at the point where the cart-track, which we had regained some distance back, enters the village, by the village watchman, spear in hand. My companion explains who I am (I had told him on the way), and that I wish to be conducted to the house of the zemindar.

"Salâam, sahib!" he exclaims, as he moves on.

"Salâam! and I am much indebted to you."

"It was nothing; I but rested awhile," and he trotted on again, jingle, jingle, jingle.

We arrive at the *garhi*, or fortalice, and the watchman knocks on the massive gateway with the butt end of his spear.

CHAPTER IV

I AM ACCORDED SHELTER

THE wicket is opened cautiously.

"Who?"

"Ramdeen."

"Oh, enter."

Next, "Why!" "How?" "Why, what!" exclaim the armed retainers, standing and sitting within the gateway as I pass through the wicket and come into the light of the oil lamp placed by the side of the gate.

"Thou never saidst thou hadst anyone with thee, Ramdeen. A Feringhee! He should have been left without; not brought in here without permission," says one of the men to my conductor. Then, swaggering up to me—

"*Too koun hye?* (Who are you?)" he asks.

The form of the question, the use of the derogatory *too*, in place of the usual honorific *ap*, was an insult. As he comes up still nearer and repeats the question in the same words, and cocks his turban in my face, I give him a clout on the ear that sends him back, and disarranges the pretty, dandy set of his head-gear.

I was not one of those given to the striking and beating of natives; I deemed it wrong, held it cowardly. But this was an insult. It was a time when the man could retaliate. He does clap his hand to his sword, and I lift up my club. There is a noise and clamour.

"Silence!" cries a voice, which, though soft, at once commanded obedience. "What means this tumult, here—within doors? Is this an open bazaar?"

"A Feringhee."

"A Feringhee!" exclaims the same voice, its intonation not so quietly commanding now.

"Who let him in?" cries a harsh voice, from the same quarter.

"He came with Ramdeen, the chokidar, came in with him —without our knowledge."

"He has struck Zalim Singh."

A low buzzing whisper runs round the upper buildings of the large courtyard. Lattices open: people peep out.

"Oh, my mother! Oh, my life!" cries a child's voice from above. "A wicked Feringhee. Down below. There."

"Silence! everyone, everywhere!" cries the same voice, soft, yet authoritative, now steadier. "Bring him to us."

"This way, this way," says another of the armed retainers, and a little to one side of the gateway I find myself before a short length of open verandah, within which another, larger, lamp is burning. On a daïs, near its edge, two men are seated, cross-legged, smoking big hooqas placed by its side. They have on simple, plain, but very white linen long coats and skull-caps.

Near the daïs stands a lad, a young man, whose extremely long, thin legs, and very short, round body, give him a ludicrous resemblance to a stork. He is of a shadowy thinness. The oddity of his natural build is added to, made the most of, by a short, tight jacket, and very close-fitting trousers. A loosely thrown on turban hangs in disorderly folds.

I make my salâam to the two men seated. Only one of them returns the salutation.

"I desire to see the zemindar Newal Kishore of Chandpore," I say.

"I am he," says the one who had raised his hand. His the soft voice.

"I hope your disposition is good?" I say, using the Hindustani equivalent of our "I hope you are well?"

"By your favour," he replies politely, in accepted form.

"I am an English officer: I was in Lindsay's regiment at Afzalnagar."

"An officer! *Hoonh!*" exclaims the other occupant of the daïs, with a contemptuous, incredulous grunt. His the harsh voice.

"We officer *are*," said I emphatically, drawing myself up, and using the royal plural, as is usual with the English in

India, though the less exalted singular is more correct colloquially, as well as grammatically. No native of rank would use "we are" instead of "I am" when speaking of himself. But the well-known imperial form has its effect.

"I am sure of it, sahib," said the gentler-voiced one.

"The commotion was because he struck Zalim Singh in the face," said the tight-turbaned retainer who had conducted me.

"Struck one of our servants in the face!" cries the man with the gruff voice, gruffly.

"Why this harshness, sir?" asked the other.

"Because he addressed me as *too*," I replied.

"He did not know who he was—thought him a mean white," said the peon, my conductor.

"Not knowing, he should have used terms of politeness," said Newal Kishore, the zemindar.

"If to all dogs you be polite,
Then you will never get a bite,"

chanted the long-legged, loose-turbaned lad.

"Thy jingle hath wisdom in it, Baola," said the zemindar.

"Zalim Singh mistook because of the sahib's appearance," persisted the peon. "Behold him."

My clothes were now dry, had not taken long to dry, but after the swim across the river, and the trudge across the sand, and over the dusty roads, my appearance could not have been pre-eminently in my favour.

"He made his mistake, got his cuff; the affair is now over," said Newal Kishore.

"So it is through life. Mistakes and knocks," said the lad named Baola, from high up in the air, "mistakes and knocks, that is life."

"Zalim Singh is a brave man, but too much of a ruffling blade, of a swash-buckler," said Newal Kishore. "Now go," addressing the peon, "and tell Zalim Singh I command him to consider this affair as closed. And you come up into the verandah, sahib. A seat, Baola."

In the verandah stand several of the rough, light, wicker-work stools which are in shape like hour-glasses. Baola jumps towards one of these with a most extraordinary, long, ludicrous leap, at which the rough-voiced man laughs—a harsh, grating laugh.

"Is the boy mad?" think I to myself. *Baola* means mad, foolish, silly; but that is no certain indication, for such names are often given to children in India in order to deprecate the anger of the gods, which arrogant, high-sounding names are thought to provoke.

He puts one of his long, lean hands round the narrow middle of the light stool, comes back with another ludicrous caper, and deposits it, with a silly, elaborate carefulness, by the side of the daïs.

"Monarch of Calcutta! Behold thy throne!" he says to me, with mock solemnity, and a wave of his long arm.

"Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!" comes the harsh laugh again.

"What foolery is this?" I say sternly.

"Never mind him, sir," said the zemindar. "He be fool to me."

> "If I be a fool to thee,
> What a great fool I must be,"

rhymed Baola, playing on the phrase.

"He is my fool, my jester."

The buffoon, the flatterer, the minstrel, the story-teller, or private novelist, all have their place on the establishment of great men in India to this day, as our grave census papers show. But even if it is the foolery of a privileged fool, the indulgence in it, towards myself, when I had declared my status, was as significant as the insolence of the armed retainer. The protecting prestige of our name was gone. Now I shall have to trust for my personal safety to myself, not to my nationality.

"Be seated, sir," goes on the zemindar.

"And thou too, Baola."

The fool subsides into a sitting attitude on the floor, with an inconceivable rapidity. It is like the sudden closing of a telescope; and as I have known that sudden closing make children and wild men laugh, so does the fool's subsidence draw a short "Ha! ha!" even from the zemindar, as well as a loud laugh from the other occupant of the daïs. With his small body the fool is now as low down on the ground as, with his extraordinarily long legs, he was before high up in the air. As I came to know afterwards, the jester could always make his sitting down and his rising up a perpetual

jest; could ever with it produce the wished-for laugh. His small parrot-like head and face, his grotesque figure, his monstrously long, thin legs, his small deformed body, his consequently grotesque movements, were great natural qualifications for his profession; and he was not so much a fool, I found, as not to make the best of them.

"From Afzalnagar, sir?" asks the zemindar.

"Yes, sir," I reply.

"Run away from there?" he goes on in his quiet voice.

"Run away!" I exclaim indignantly. It is not a pleasant word to have applied to one—though as a matter of fact I had been obliged to run—and hard.

"I meant no disparagement, sir," said Newal Kishore, in his soft, suave voice, and with his soft, suave manner. "Under similar circumstances—ahem!—I should apply the same word to myself."

The natives are candid in such matters, no doubt; but, still, at another time he would not, most probably, have used the word in regard to me. He welcomed the opportunity.

"Under some circumstances there may be nothing left but to run," he goes on.

"Before the fighting has begun is the best time for to run," interpolates the fool. "So say I, silly the wise."

"What were the circumstances, sir?"

I gave them briefly; saying nothing about the worship in the forest—not mentioning it—only saying I had lost my way in the jungle until I met the hurkaru.

"You're purpose in coming here?" asks the man with the harsh voice.

"To claim the zemindar's hospitality; obtain the shelter I was told I should be sure to find here."

"The ass!" says my questioner.

"It is easy to give people shelter under other people's roofs," says the jester.

"And your further purpose, sir?" asks the zemindar.

"To get to Lalkote as speedily as I can," said I, naming the small station which stood nearest to Afzalnagar.

"Hurrying out of the frying-pan is within the scope of a fool's understanding, but to hasten from it into the fire, that is

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beyond it," said the jester, shaking his head, so that the loose folds of his turban waggled.

"What does he say?" I ask.

"Sir, the rule of the Company has passed away at Lalkote too," says the owner of the mansion.

"And the sovereignty of the King of Delhi been re-established," says the man by his side.

"There is no such thing as the sovereignty of the King of Delhi," I say.

"It existed long before yours," says he, that one.

"Guard thy tongue, Dya Ram! Guard thy tongue, my good brother!" says Newal Kishore.

"Has there been a mutiny at Lalkote too?" I ask.

"Yes," says the fool, "and all the English people have run away—ahem!—removed in haste, from there too."

"And the English government given place to the old rule of the King of Delhi," reiterates the hard-tongued man, the brother of the zemindar, as now I find him to be: what a contrast, in face, figure, and voice, between the two!

"In name," I say.

"One king comes and another king goes, but the king at hand is the king I knows," gabbles the fool.

"Exercise not thou thy small wits in this matter, fool," says Newal Kishore, in a voice less soft. "Rulers and kings are not things——"

"Well rhymed, paternal uncle mine," said the jester; "an excellent rhyme, by my belly!"

"I meant it not. I leave the foolish rhyming to thee. But kings and sovereignties are not things for fools to meddle with."

"The sovereignty of the King of Delhi has been re-established, it has been proclaimed," persists he named Dya Ram.

"Do not thou go changing places with the fool, brother," says the zemindar to him. "Proclamation is one thing, establishment another. Where are the king's troops? His local representatives? We live in our own village, and on our own land, and await events here. I have paid the last half-year's land cess—we shall see who comes for the next half-year's. We are country folk who sit quiet in our own houses minding our own affairs. Most certainly, on the one hand, the

râj (rule) of the King of Delhi was the prior one; most certainly, on the other, the *râj* of the Company *Bahadur* was a good one, producing peace and quiet. Let all that pass. The business in hand is about this gentleman. You will rest here to-night, sir——"

"Do not thou go changing places with the fool," says his brother, interrupting him. "Giving shelter to a Feringhee at this time."

"Brother, thou knowest what Munoo says, 'No guests may be dismissed in the evening by a householder': likewise that he shall entertain him 'whether he come in fit season or unseasonably': and 'the satisfaction of a guest will assuredly bring the householder benefit in this world and the next.'"

"I must make for Tulsipore then," I say. "I could go on early in the morning."

"You could not travel safely in the open daylight: Tulsipore is forty miles off. And I could not provide you with means of carriage in the morning. My son is away at a fair with my draught-cattle and horses. He returns to-morrow afternoon. You can start to-morrow evening, and travel all the night, and reach Tulsipore next morning early. That is the best plan. It would be very dangerous for you to be out alone in the day-time. You had better travel under cover of the night. You will remain here to-night and to-morrow forenoon. That is settled." There was a quiet authority in his soft voice. "Now is bedtime. Ho! Chimmun Lall."

The man summoned presents himself.

"Conduct this gentleman to a guest-chamber: see that he is in no way troubled or molested, and that he has everything that he wants: on thy head be it. Hungry and thirsty must you be, sir?"

"Both: much."

"Of course; you have been deprived of your usual evening meal at the Mess House."

"They have had a different sort of entertainment there this evening," said the jester. "Kook!" and he made an odd noise in his throat. Dya Ram laughs.

"Fool, truly fool!" said Newal Kishore quickly to the lad.

"What does he mean?" I ask.

"Sir, what meaning is there in the words of fools?"

"But it made your brother laugh."

"Sir, one fool makes another: folly breeds folly. All that I meant to say was that you had not dined, judging from your own account. Chimmun Lall, see that the sahib has food and drink and everything that he wants."

He gives me the "permission to depart," which really means a command to go.

I rise from the stool.

"Salâam," I say, "and much thanksgiving."

I move away with the chamberlain.

We go down the whole length of the courtyard to the further end of it. Chimmun Lall, who has procured a small oil lamp on the way, conducts me into an apartment on the ground floor, which, with the corresponding length of enclosed verandah in front, is to constitute my quarters for the night. He puts down the lamp and goes away to bring food and drink and bed-clothes. The furniture in the room consists of a bedstead, a wicker-work stool, a water jar in the corner, and a bit of board on which to sit when performing your ablutions or when eating, simple but sufficient. I just glance at that. What concerns me more is the stifling heat of the place. Being on the ground floor the room has no window. All dwelling-places, above those of the lowest class, are built on the same plan in the East. It is that of a courtyard with buildings, two stories or more in height, round it, the lower story presenting on the outside, a solid blank surface for the whole of its height. This gives the building its defensive character; the only entrance is through the one gateway. The air entered my room only through the doorway, which had the verandah in front.

When Chimmun Lall comes back he is accompanied by another servant, of lesser degree, who carries a basket of food, a jar of water, and the bedclothes, which consist of a pillow and a sheet. With him comes also the jester. Those of his class are always very curious, and he may also entertain the hope of picking up a joke or two at my expense.

"Can I have the bedstead put out in the verandah?" I say to Chimmun Lall. "It is stifling close in here: beyond bound hot."

"Certainly. Kullooa and Baola, carry it out."

They do so. It is of course very light.

"I should like to sleep up there," I say, when we are out in the verandah, looking up towards a balcony overhead.

"That may not be, sir," said the fool. "We could not carry our hospitality quite so far. Those are the women's apartments.

"No, no, you could not go up there," he continues. "I have made a rhyme, a rhyme—

> However nice and good a cat your tommy-cat may be,
> Up among the singing birds, better not put he.

How good! Kook!"

"Jabber, jabber, jabber: always jabber, jabber, jabber," said Chimmun Lall, a grave and ceremonious personage.

"Out of the fulness of the mind the tongue speaketh. A fool has no words, but a wise man hath discourse."

"And now, sahib, salâam," says Chimmun Lall to me. "Fair sleep be yours," and he moves away.

Baola lingers behind the others.

"Why did you address me as Monarch of Calcutta?" I ask of him.

"Because that is the only place in which you are monarchs now; your dominion is limited to that spot."

"And what did you mean by saying there was another sort of entertainment at my Mess House this evening?"

"Oh, did you not know? The sepoys attacked and killed the officers while they were sitting together at dinner. Killed them all, every one of them, kook!" and he capers away.

CHAPTER V

A TROUBLED NIGHT

I DRINK and drink, but I cannot eat. I draw the light bedstead to the very edge of the verandah, in immediate contact with the outer air. Dark thoughts throng upon me, but I strive to struggle against them. I strive to occupy my attention with the things about me. Across the courtyard stalls and stables. They seem vacant. The zemindar had said his horses and draught-cattle were away. In the corner of the courtyard near my bedroom a shrine, before which burns a lamp, a point of radiance in the gloom. Within it an image, that of a beautiful woman seated on a lotus flower, holding in one hand a necklace, in the other a rope. She seemed to cast her calm, benignant, protecting glance down the whole length of the courtyard. Before the shrine, along with the lamp, various shaped vessels, a thurible sending up a slender column of fragrant smoke, a pot of basil: offerings, food, flowers, coins. I set my eyes to observe these things; my mind to consider their inner significance, what they may mean to the people here. The woman upborne by the slender stalk of the flower—what thoughts that—I sink into sleep.

Time and place considered that sleep must be broken, whatever my weariness, whatever my trust in the good faith of my host, in his acknowledgment of the sacredness of hospitality: was not his brother avowedly inimical?

I dream. Back in England. The servant knocking at my bedroom door. No dream. A real knocking. It comes from the direction of the stables. The sound swallowed up in the weird howling of jackals, and I drop asleep again. Another dream. Anxious in the forest, there the shrine of the dread goddess, there the brawny, hairy form, the fierce, unforgettable,

one-eyed countenance of the man who had borne the torch, there his shaven crown with the white sword-scar. I gaze towards the shrine. That is not the dread image of Kali, not the devilish countenance of the goddess of blood; but the softer, the benign and beautiful countenance of the goddess in the courtyard. But there the man: the ugly, evil, one-eyed face, on which the light from the lamp before this shrine, which places my bed partially in shadow, shines full: the brawny, hairy limbs. I am lying on this bed, not standing behind a tree: there is the courtyard, not a forest glade: above me a balcony, not a canopy of leaves. I put out my hand and grasp the club which I had placed at the head of my bed. I feel the minute reticulation of the brass wire wove round it. I jump up, step out into the courtyard, into the light from the lamp.

"*Kya!* (What!)" and the man rushes at me, a long knife gleaming in his hand. I put the club across me, holding it quarter-staff wise, and throw him back with it. I run back. I had been pretty good at single-stick. With a light staff in my hand I should not have minded; but what rendered the club so lethal a weapon if brought down full on a man's skull, the heavy loading at the end, made it difficult to wield it quickly, to use it with one hand. He makes another rush at me, a more furious rush. I have grasped the club in the same way as before, and jumping aside as he was almost on the top of me—he did not calculate on the quickness of hand and foot and eye our games give us—I dashed the middle of the club against his left forearm and sent him staggering along his course. I run across the courtyard, toward the cattle stalls, away from him, so as to have more room for the swing of the club with both hands when he comes at me next. I see a man emerge from one of the stalls. Thinking him a servant, I turn toward him and am about to address him, when my assailant calls out to him. I do not comprehend his words; they belong most likely to the secret language of the confraternity, but their import is clear. Both the men rush at me simultaneously in a combined attack. What to do now was evident. I could not let them both come upon me together. I put the club down at the charge, spring forward, meet the new-comer in his rush, dash the heavy end of the club against his ribs, knock

him off his legs. Again was it well for me that I had stood behind so many a wicket, my usual position in the field, and played so many a football match. I knew where the other fellow was, as it were, by instinct. Turning sharp round and swinging the club up with both hands I struck him a blow on his uplifted arm with the end of it. He uttered a yell. "Yes; your arm is somewhat damaged, my friend!" Then I shout "Thieves! Thieves! Thieves!" "Thieves!" shouts the watchman at the gate, who had probably been asleep on his watch, a not unusual proceeding with the men of his nocturnal calling. A great commotion. Shrill female voices sound from the upper rooms. Lights flash, down, up, about. Children scream. There is a shouting and calling. "What is it?" "What is it?" "Thieves! Robbers!" "Oh, my mother!" "Oh, Supreme one!" "Turn out, men!" "*Daka! Daka!*" Daka is the attack on a house, or on a party of travellers, by the armed band of robbers known as dacoits.

"What is all this?" cries the harsh-voiced brother, Dya Ram, from the balcony over my head.

"The Feringhee!" cries a shrill female voice.

"Curses be on his head!" he calls down. Then from an upper verandah, a little lower down, comes the clear voice of the zemindar,

"Where is the guard? Keep the men together, Zalim Singh. I come, I come."

To the noise within is added the yelling of jackals without. And now the man I had knocked off his legs utters a curious cry, no doubt a signal cry, and darts towards the stall he had come out of, the other following him with his dangling arm. I rush after them. I stop at the door. I do not like to tumble in after them. I peep in. By the light on the floor, put by its side to show its position, I see an aperture, at the foot of the back wall, through which the first man has made his escape, and through which the other, the bigger, brawnier ruffian, is wriggling his way, his wounded arm no doubt hurts him. But he has his head and shoulders through, and will be wholly through soon. I dart forward and seize him by the ankles. They are slippery with oil—it is the habit of these thieves to anoint their bodies with oil, so as to make it difficult to seize or hold them—and he takes them out of my hands

with a practised wriggle. But seeing a rope lying near, I make a knot loosely on the end of this, slip it over his ankles, and then draw it tight, tie it with a double knot, and he is secure. But the pull on the rope is very great, greater than he himself, in his position, could exert. I go back against that, tug hand over hand along the rope until I reach the peg driven into the earthen floor to which the other end of it is attached, and wind the rope round it. He cannot now pull himself out or be pulled out. He is a safe prisoner. There are voices at the door. I go out. There is Newal Kishore with a drawn sword in his right hand, a small round shield on his left arm; behind him a guard of his retainers armed with sword and spear and matchlock.

"They say, sahib, that you shouted 'Thieves! Robbers!'" cries the zemindar quickly.

"I did."

"But where are they?"

"*One* of them is in there."

"In there!"

"Yes."

"Let us go in and capture him!" cries Zalim Singh, the man with whom I had the encounter.

"I have secured him," I say. "He is tied by the heels; lying on the ground. He was trying to creep through a hole at the bottom of the wall. He is one of the men I saw in the forest."

"Saw in the forest!"

"Yes, when I lost my way, as I told you. I saw them worshipping at the shrine of Kali."

"Beneath a peepul tree?" says Newal Kishore quickly.

"Yes; the same."

"They had planned this attack. They were worshipping for it. Let us enter, sahib. And you, Zalim Singh. The rest keep back."

"All but me," says the jester, hopping in after us.

"That is it—I understand," says Newal Kishore, when we have got in. "They have enlarged the stable drain. They knew the position of it, and that the masonry about it had got loose. We must look to our weak points. Robbers and

thieves will now be active. Perchance we may know this fellow. Know his face."

The members of these Indian criminal guilds and confraternities carry on some honest occupation as well, not only in order to add to their means of subsistence, but to shield their nefarious practices. The murderous Thugs pursued the inoffensive callings of cultivator, mechanic, trader, as well: many even held posts under the English Government.

"You tied his legs very tight, sir," the zemindar says; "see how still he lies."

He lay very still—dead still.

"We must now pull him in. Be prepared, Zalim Singh. These men are ready to fight under all circumstances. He may have some weapon in his hand. Drag thou him in, Baola."

"If he puts his hands on either side of the hole it may be very difficult to pull him in," says Zalim Singh. "We may have to go round and pull him out."

"Trial first," says the fool as he seizes the rope with a grin and a caper. "Oh, you are coming in!" says he, grimacing at the aperture; "it is like the hauling in of a fish. You are coming in, my beauty! Now to land him!" and he gives a tug that brings the captive in with a run.

"Why! What!" cries the fool, dropping the rope and jumping aside. "There is no face to recognise!" He points with his long, lean forefinger. "He has no more head than I have."

It was true. We all fell back. A headless trunk lay before us. The dissociation of the head and body whose conjunction had impressed itself upon my brain so deeply, affects me with a feeling of bewilderment as well as of horror. There it lies; the brawny body without the fierce, cruel, one-eyed countenance: that away.

"What has happened? Who has done this?" I exclaim.

"His friends: those without: the other members of the gang. They have carried off the head to prevent recognition. They are gone. We must have this trunk removed in the morning. It must be thrust out through the hole. We must have the Brahmins to purify the stall. No horses or cattle may stand in it until that is done. Put something across the hole, Zalim Singh; drive in two or three pegs across it, and

set a man to watch," and the zemindar sheaths his sword and walks out into the courtyard.

There he tells what we had found to his brother and the other male members of the household now all assembled, and the boys rush away to carry the tale, the startling tale, to the women in the rooms above.

Newal Kishore is not sparing of his eulogiums.

"It is to the sahib that we are indebted for our escape from the loss of life, of many lives, perchance—perchance loss of everything," he cries. "See how soon has been proved the truth of that saying of Munoo which I quoted to thee, Dya Ram, that the satisfaction of the guest will bring benefit to the householder. And it may be that the benefit to us has been without limit. In this time of want of Government protection, and of fearlessness on the part of the wicked, we know not what loss of substances, what worse ills, might not have befallen us had the robbers gained possession of the house. But tell us, sir, how you became aware of their being here—two gained entrance?"

"Yes." And then I narrate how I saw and knew the man, how he rushed at me, the arrival of the other, my blow to each, my shouting "Thieves!"

"He was anxious to kill you before you could do that, give the alarm."

"You fought well, sahib," said Zalim Singh, clapping me on the shoulder, and I did not mind the familiarity.

"These English people are great fighters," said someone.

Then I tell about my rushing after the two men into the stall, of the disappearance of one, of the other being half-way through the aperture when I seized him by the ankles, his wriggling them free——

"Of course they were oiled——"

"Yes,"—my tying them with the rope.

"How clever!"

"Most clever!" And again some other of the lads rush away to narrate the story to mother and sisters.

"You heard them digging?" said the zemindar.

"Yes," I said.

"And the man on watch at the gate did not," he said significantly. "I shall talk with him."

"I soon lost the sound in the howling of the jackals; it was very loud and very near—apparently close under the wall."

"Most close," said he dryly. "Why, it was the robbers themselves who made the cry. To imitate the calls of birds and the cries of animals, such as owls and pea-fowls, jackals, and hyænas, and so on, is part of their calling. But still the watchman—however, that for to-morrow."

Then, in reply to a question from the gruff-voiced brother, I give the full details of the worship in the forest.

"I suppose the iron rod they presented before the shrine was the one used to enlarge the drain?"

"To be sure," says the zemindar. "They had noted that drain, its condition. They knew my two sons, brave men and bold, and many of my retainers were away. They planned the attack for to-night. They made worship to their goddess. But our own goddess proved the stronger."

"Most deeply are we indebted to you, sir," he went on, "but most deeply are we indebted to our goddess too. It was by the light of her lamp that you saw the man."

"And he was secured by means of a rope," said the jester.

"True. A most wise word, fool. Let the lamp before the shrine be replenished. Fresh offerings of the silver and gold we might have lost shall be made to her to-morrow. Had the robbers obtained possession of the house I know not what might have happened; loss of life, loss of honour, loss of everything. Thousands of thanks to you, sir. Deeply am I indebted to you, sir. My life and fortune are at your service," he says in the haste of his gratitude.

"It was nothing. I had to fight for my life," I say. "My being here indicates my cause of gratitude to you."

"Have you all you want?"

"Oh yes."

"Is your bed comfortable?"

"Most, by your favour."

"You will be glad to find the rest which has been interrupted."

"Yes. I am very tired."

"You were not too tired to fight a good fight with the robbers, sir," said Zalim Singh.

"As for that, however tired a man may be his arms will work to save his life," I said.

"So will his legs," said the jester.

We separate.

As I am moving across the courtyard towards my verandah, I feel that many eyes are gazing down upon me from above. Doubtless what I have done has been told to them with exaggeration. As I pass by the shrine I gaze at the calm, protecting face, at the rope dangling from one hand, with a strange feeling. I had come in contact with something new.

CHAPTER VI

A HURRIED DEPARTURE

THE next morning I found myself the honoured guest. The master of the house sent to inquire how I had slept. The mistress sent a similar message. Should I like a warm bath? It is provided. It was strange to find oneself without any of the ordinary conveniences of life. Camp life had taught me how to do without them or find substitutes for them: the chewed end of a bitter twig did very well for tooth-brush—the natives so use it—but I find the prettily inlaid wooden tooth-comb a troublesome substitute for my hair-brushes. However, the bath was the great thing, and I found it delightfully refreshing. Then my food was brought me on a fine brass dish, and I had a fine brass cup to drink out of. "They will be defiled," I say to Chimmun Lall, the chamberlain. "Assuredly," he replies, ruefully, "but the chowdry has ordered it so." Chowdry was the caste title-of-honour of his master.

And when I go to see the chowdry he is once more profuse in his thanks and protestations: his house and life are at my service. I am lucky to find myself in such safe, pleasant quarters. I am obliged to the robbers.

I ask eagerly about the news from Afzalnagar.

"None, sir. I have sent a servant in there to obtain information. He has not returned yet."

We settle about the mode of my going. "My sons and the horses return in the afternoon. I supply you with a horse both fleet and strong: he will carry you the forty miles. You can reach your destination under cover of the night. There is no difficulty about finding your way: a village road takes you straight to the high road, and then you follow that.

I arm you with a sword. You will be best by yourself. You start the moment it is dark."

I remember the letter-carrier of the night before. I ask if I could have the letters sent by him.

"You cannot, sir. It is a private post. But I can send them in my own *lefafa* (envelope). You put them into a small envelope and direct them, and I will put them with my letters in a bigger one."

"They will reach?"

"Most assuredly, sir. Many great bankers and traders are concerned in this post. Very important communications go by it."

I return to my own room. There falls on the house the deep stillness of the early afternoon hours, the hottest of the day. The bustle and movement of the morning, with its multifarious household duties, those connected with the preparation and distribution of the midday meal, the one cooked meal of the day, are over. Now is the time for repose, for rest. Now is the time to avoid the open courtyard, into which the sun blazes down, and seek the shade of the verandahs and rooms. Now is the time for the calm siesta: best to pass these flaming hours in sleep. A deep heavy quiet hangs over the house. Supplied with writing materials I have passed a couple of hours—a boy fanning me—in the writing of letters—one official, the others private. In the latter I give particulars of all that has befallen me. It is from such letters that this narrative is compiled, and remembrance; those who passed through that terrible time know how ineffaceable are its memories. I had just directed my envelope when the calm chamberlain hurried into the room with a very disturbed countenance. The chowdry sahib wishes to see me—at once. I find him in a state of great perturbation: his suave quiet mode of manner and speech gone.

"You must depart at once," he says.

"Depart at once?" I say.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"They are sending out troops from Afzalnagnar to seize you. My servant has just come back from there with the news."

"How did they learn I was here? From him?"

"No; he is faithful. It must have been from those devil-spawn robbers. You must leave at once?"

"But now! in the heat of the day, in the open sunshine! You said that it would not be safe for me to be out in the daytime: that it would be better for me to travel under cover of the night."

"But this is an unexpected emergency. I thought your being here would not become known. And it would not have but for those scoundrelly housebreakers. They desire to be revenged on you: on me."

"Have your horses come back? I have not seen them go to the stables."

"They have not, nor my sons and the retainers with them. That is it: I have but few men to defend the house."

"But they would not attack your mansion?"

"Would they not! Glad of the excuse to despoil it, to deal with it lawlessly in the name of lawfulness. Sir, those robbers of last night would come with the soldiers and ravage it with a double zest from having been foiled last night. They would all be filled with the thought of a rich booty. You know we natives keep our treasures in our own houses."

He had said his life and fortune were at my service; but that, of course, was rhetorical exaggeration.

"And it is not only that, sir. I could not have the sanctity of my zenana violated; its inmates exposed to insult and injury."

He could not but put his wife and children first, before me.

"You must depart at once," he goes on.

"But your sons and the horses were to arrive in the afternoon. Could I not wait until they do? An enemy could not rush into your house in a moment. Your gate is strong."

"My sons will not arrive until late in the afternoon. The force from Afzalnagar may be here any moment. They could blow open the gate with gunpowder. They may bring a gun. I cannot have cannon-balls thrown into my house. You must quit it."

He spoke peremptorily. He had received me standing: risen, jumped from his daïs when I entered.

"In searching for the louse they tousel the hair," said the jester; there also, his comparison was not complimentary.

"I speak for your sake, sir," went on the zemindar. "If they appear before the gate before you have passed out of it you may not be able to pass out of it at all. You must depart at once, sir."

"But how, if the horses have not come back?"

"There is a camel in the village. I have ordered it to be brought. And, with reference to the danger of travelling in the daytime, you must disguise yourself."

"Disguise myself!"

"Put on Hindustani dress. It would not matter in the darkness of the night, but you could not appear as you are in the daytime; it would draw all eyes upon you from miles off. It is lucky that your complexion is dark" (my maternal grandfather, Admiral Sir Dugdale Hawke, had married a Portuguese lady when stationed off Lisbon), "and you speak our language better than most of your class."

The English in India speak Hindustani in a lofty mode of their own. I had tried to speak it after the common manner of the natives themselves, as did our poor colonel, one of the old school.

"The clothes are in the next room. Put them on at once. Baola will help you. He is here for the purpose."

With antic and grimace the jester helps me to remove my own garments, don the others.

"Off with them!" and he tugs my trousers off.

"On with them!" and he hands me a pair of pyjamas. They are of the sort fitting tight at the ankle.

"Loose ones would be cooler," I say.

"These will be better to ride in. Your hands and face are of a good colour" (much exposure to the sun, in shooting, had burnt them to a deep brown), "but your legs are of a leprous tint. Better for them not to show."

"I will keep my stockings on. Many gentlemen of the land wear them."

"They do. Now for the turban. Here's the skull-cap."

"Could I not wear that alone," said I, putting it on, "the turban will be so hot, so heavy."

"But may save you from cracked or cloven crown, from blow of club or sword. I have had some taps on my empty noddle because of the foolish things—what people do not like is foolish—that have come out of it, and I know the difference between having on a linen skull-cap and a good thick turban"; and he wound the long folds round my head. "There, that is finished.

"Good, very good!" he cried, jumping back and looking at me. "The lion has now put on the ass's skin, or, perhaps, the other way.

"O belly-filler mine!" he calls out as he capers back ahead of me, "if they wish to turn us Hindoos into Christians, I have turned one Christian into a Hindoo."

"They fit you well. They belong to my son. He is a well-built man," says my host, surveying me. "And now on with this sword and shield, sir."

"Shield!—I know not how to use a shield."

"Need will give the use—in a moment. And take this purse: it holds copper and silver. And these gold pieces: put them away in your waist-belt."

"I shall not need them."

"Give them me, uncle mine. I'll be a wise man and take them," said the fool, stretching out his long hand.

"Gold is always of use, sir; it may ransom your life, your weapons; put it away. I have appointed Zalim Singh to go with you."

"Zalim Singh!—he'll bear a grudge——"

"Not he. A bit of a ruffling blade and a roysterer, true; but he is loyal and brave, will stand by you in case of any difficulty or danger, as I have enjoined him to do. Knows camels. And now go, sir; I have to hurry my guest away for his own advantage. Baolo will conduct you to the gate."

"Here is my letter. And now, thanksgiving for all that you have done for me."

"Thanksgiving for all you have done for me, sir."

We descend and move along the verandah. As the jester shuffles and hops along by my side, he says—

"You will have fine games along the road, sir."

"Fine games?"

"Hunt-the-hare, and hide-and-seek, and such-like. Kook!"

We pass out through the wicket. The camel is down: Zalim Singh mounted. I mount into the hind seat. With a snarling grunt and a rough double jerk the camel has heaved himself up into the air. We are off.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAMEL RIDE

I EXPERIENCE a strange sensation, sitting there in my disguise, as we move off; this deepens as we enter the village, which we lounge through slowly. Then Zalim Singh urges the camel on, with fullest use of whip and heels, keeps him at his utmost speed. But he is not a good camel. I know that from the jolting. It is not that I cannot ride. I have ridden a camel often before. I know that you must sit slack, not tight. I have learnt their qualities. The camel is called the ship of the desert, and one camel differs from another as a lugger differs from a yacht. This is a lugger. It is an uncomfortable discovery. Firstly, of course, with reference to my getting away from this dangerous neighbourhood as quickly as possible, but also with regard to my getting to Tulsipore. He has shown his poor class by his want of smoothness; he will show it by his want of speed and endurance also. However, if he will only get us well away from Chandpore now. I look back. It is out of sight. But the pace slackens; notwithstanding Zalim Singh's vigorous tuggings at the nose-string, his vigorous use of heels and whip, slackens and slackens. The beast falls into a walk. As we slouch along the vacant, silent road at the level of the foliage of the trees, dust-laden and drooping with the terrible heat, I keep glancing back anxiously. Then by dint of much beating and tugging Zalim Singh gets him once more into a trot, more slow and lumbering than the first, but still a trot. We have passed out of the cultivated tract and entered on a barren plain, a reservoir of heat. Does he like the desert-like plain, the fierce heat? At all events he keeps up the lumbering trot until almost across it. Then he drops into a walk.

And no beatings or objurgations will get him out of it. A shake of the string, a touch of the heel will get the camel of good breed on; he is of a sensitive, high, noble, generous spirit. The camel of low breed, like this one, is obstinate, ill-tempered, dogged, sulky, vicious. He answers with angry grunts, a gobbling out of his tongue.

"Not a good camel," I say.

"'Fore-God, no! The donkey-sired son of Satan is not!" says Zalim Singh. "A beast of low, mean birth and low, mean disposition. Swearing by my father, he has made my arm ache."

A sound breaks the dead silence; the camel's tread on his spongy pads did not. A sharp, distant clatter; behind us.

"The sound of horses' hoofs," I say.

"Yes."

"Perhaps some of the troopers from Afzalnagar—in pursuit of me," I say.

"To be sure; it cannot be anything else," says Zalim Singh.

He cuts the camel fiercely across the head and gets him into a slow, this-way-that-way-swinging trot. As we had passed by the trees in the cultivated tract there had been no movement in the air to stir the topmost, tiniest of the leaves downhanging with the heat. No movement upon the surface of the road, of the plain, only the stationary quiver of the hot air. Now, as I look back, upon the edge of the barren plain a moving cloud of dust appears; it is from the horses' hoofs whose clatter rings so clear.

"They are overtaking us fast," I say.

"Fast," says Zalim Singh, looking back. "Now if we had under us a camel of my native Bhikanere we might have some chance of keeping ahead of them."

"This is not a camel of Bhikanere."

"Truly not. He was never near Bhikanere. He is not desert born."

"They must catch us up."

"Yes. A camel of Bhikanere flies like the wind, responds to the slightest touch, will run his best until he drop and die. This beast!"

"He is the beast we are on."

"True, sir. And so they must catch us up."

"We may reach that jungle first." The face of one stood up before us.

"We shall. But it would not afford you shelter, sir. It is not thick enough for you to hide in. They have seen us, seen two men upon the camel. They would miss you, search for you. And you would not have been able to get away far. They are coming on fast."

"Very," I said, glancing back.

"You see that the jungle is very thin and light, sir."

"Yes."

We are now at its margin.

"Not thick enough to shelter you."

"Allowed, allowed. What then?"

"We must meet them sitting."

"Sitting!"

"Make the camel sit down. There, by the four trees; under them a well. We will dismount there as ordinary travellers would. We must try and make them believe we are such. If we cannot deceive them, why then the pleasure of God, and swords—arms and legs—fighting and running—best that last than first."

"Hoosh! hoosh!" to the camel as we get under one of the trees. He flops down—he is ready enough at that; we jump off. "Sit down by his head."

I do so.

"Take the nose-string. You are holding the camel; I am drawing water."

He releases from the side of the saddle his *lotah*, or brass drinking vessel, without which no native ever travels, and going up to the mouth of the well lets the lotah down into it by means of the string always attached to it when on a journey. The cloud of dust swept near. The five horsemen —they belong to the Irregular Cavalry—pull up in the road, from which the trees and the well lie a few yards off.

"Two Hindustani travellers," calls out one of them.

I gaze at them curiously. Will my disguise hold good? Am I sitting like a native? They do everything different from us: use the flexor muscles when we use the extensor.

"Are you in pursuit of a fugitive Englishman?" Zalim Singh calls out.

My heart stands still.

"Riding on a camel with a Hindustani driver?" he goes on.

"Yes—yes."

"But now were they here. They had hidden the camel behind yon trees. They stole away round that corner as we drew near; but I saw the Englishman—in the hind seat. Have a drink of water," and he held towards them the lotah (which he had now drawn up) dangling from its dripping string.

"No, no," and they have dashed onward.

Gone! Only that and the difference between life and death!

"Mount, sir, mount!"

"I thirst—greatly."

"Quick, then."

I place my curved palm beneath my chin—I may not put my lips to the lotah—he pours the water into it.

An orgasm.

We clamber up into the saddle and make our way along the margin of the jungle, at right angles to the road. By some sudden change of temper, some access of amenity, the camel obeys the command to trot, keeps the pace up for quite a long way. The rough, jerking trot is painful, torturing. But now the most joyous torture, the most acceptable painfulness, is over, and done with.

"*Chul! chul!* (Go on! go on!)" cries Zalim Singh, as he strikes his heels on the leathern flanks, and uses the whip to the utmost. But the camel drops into a walk.

"The misfortunate, low-breed, mean-spirited, poor-hearted, dull-blooded, pedigree-less, son of a baggage-bearing father and mother!" cries Zalim Singh. "He has made my back ache as well as my arm. And in my native land I have ridden a camel the whole night long and felt it no more than lying on my bed."

"Your native land, Bhikanere?"

"So, sir."

"Of there the camels good?"

"Best in the world. Swift and easy: carry you a hundred miles in a night."

"Well, if this beast did not trot smoothly, he trotted at the right moment. You did that well."

"It was not I: he trotted of his own will."

"I do not mean that. I mean your deceiving of the troopers."

"The unfaithful to their salt!"

"You side not with them?"

"Side with them?"

"Against the Company: with the King of Delhi."

"Sir, of Bhikanere I. Neither of the Company nor King of Delhi know I as master: only of the Maharajah of Bhikanere."

"I thought you were about to tell them who I was," I exclaim, the memory of that moment rushing upon me—torrentially. "Then, when you said 'Are you in pursuit of an Englishman?'"

I had thought he might do so because of my having struck him, in revenge for that.

"Betray you, sir! I am a Rajput!"

"Forgiveness! The words slipped out. It is a moment of disturbance."

"Sir, neither against, nor for, you English am I. What cause for love or hate with regard to you, have I? I live not under your rule, in your dominions. But at this moment I serve the chowdry Newal Kishore. He has entrusted you to my care. I will strive to transport you safely to Tulsipore as I might a bag of valuables, an important document. Force and fate will have their way; but I must strive to do so, even to the giving of my life—not for your sake, but of my duty."

"Forgiveness. I believe you fully."

And so we kept on westward, the mass of the jungle to our right, the void of the barren plain to our left. The palpitating sun is nearing the undulating horizon. We come to a village track. It goes north and south. We follow it—northwards, our direction. We pass across the narrow wedge-like end of the jungle. We are once more in a cultivated track, with its trees and wells and groves and villages. The sun is very low: there is a sudden cooling of the air. This coolness is foe as well as friend. The heat had been friend as well as foe: it had kept the roads solitary. They will now be peopled: at this season of the year the morning and evening hours are the ones for movement. And now is the time for the home-

coming of the flocks and herds. We pass them, meet them, converging on the villages. A herd of cattle, bullocks and cows and buffaloes: only boys and girls with them. Flocks of goats and sheep: only boys and girls, children, with them. I lounge easily in the saddle. I take a fancy-dress-ball sort of interest in my disguise. I look down fearlessly at the juveniles. But it was another thing as we advanced further into the cultivated tract and met groups and gangs of men, armed men; for if they carried nothing else they always carried the lethal club. And we began to meet many of them. This is the dead time of the year for agricultural work. The fields around spread one vast, arid fallow, waiting for the deluge of the rains to soften the ground and enable it to be broken up. This fact had a great bearing on the events of the time. The countryside was made unsafe, as many of our poor countrymen and countrywomen found to their cost. The idle population was free for evil deeds, as was proved too often, too sadly. Instead of the separation due to each man being engaged in his own work, there was the aggregation due to the universal idleness. At this time of sudden lawlessness men formed themselves into bands, not for purposes of defence only, but for purposes of offence also. Satan found much work for those idle hands to do. As we met these bands and groups I took a more serious, a life-and-death interest in my disguise. I do not look down on the armed men looking up curiously at me as amusedly as I had looked down on the children. I do not sit so easily in the saddle. My disguise may fail me. Once it did. Turning a sharp corner in the road we see a great procession coming towards us. This leisure time is the time for great cavalcades, rich men making pilgrimage, marriage processions. The cunning Brahmins generally manage to place the auspicious days for these events in this period of idleness. We are almost on it. "Had we not better get off the road?" I say to Zalim Singh. "No; it will draw attention to us." I like not the impact, the involvement. We had passed through the running footmen and the mace-bearers heading the procession; now we are in the midst of the soldiery, horse and foot—recognised, a bullet would bring me down. We pass by the elephant on which sits the great man; we are in the thick of the miscellaneous following of

men on horses, on foot, on camels. The sides of many camels brush against the side of our camel, the shoulders of their riders brush against our shoulders, a close throng. I am nose to nose with one man, and we look into one another's eyes; he starts and utters a loud exclamation—rud-a-dub rub-a-dub, the kettle-drums sound, the trumpets blare, he is carried on in the quickened stream of the procession; we have passed through the end of it, the camel gives us a trot.

Once the road ran by the side of the high earthen mound inclosing a very entensive mango grove. As we approached the end of the grove we became aware of some men seated on the bank. Now the camel's nose is near them. Now we are parallel with them. Six men seated in a row, the spears and matchlocks they have in their hands held straight up; they could touch us with muzzle or point. A row of most unpleasant, villainous faces, which, however much they may differ in other respects, have this in common, they all bear conspicuous the mark "jail-bird." We are slouching past the last man.

"Ho, goers, stop!" he shouts. "Descend and have a drink of water."

"Thanksgiving — infinite — infinite," says Zalim Singh, lengthening out his speech, "but we had a drink at the last well."

"Then come down and have a smoke—good tobacco."

"Your kindness is great. But we may not stop. The night is near, and our destination far," replies Zalim Singh, looking round over his shoulder.

"If thou wilt not stop to our invitation stop to our command. Pull string, or I will shoot thee," he shouts after us. He holds a matchlock.

"Let him shoot!" says Zalim Singh.

"That is all very well, my friend," say I, with a laugh—one is very apt to laugh in the strain and excitement of a critical position—"when I have the back seat, you the front one."

"We shall be sideways to him when he shoots, on our way round that corner; he has to blow up the match."

It is just as we are winding round the corner that the detonation comes and the ill-made bullet whistles harshly overhead.

"They are not pursuing us," I say after a while, looking back. "No one round the corner."

"They won't. Had this camel been a good one, instead of the sorry beast he is, they might have done so."

"I thought they might come after me."

"They did not know you were an Englishman. Your disguise is good. It is lucky your complexion is so swarthy. That was a near examination."

"They looked like thieves and robbers."

"They were thieves and robbers. There are plenty of them about—thieves, robbers, cut-throats, poisoners, stranglers, thimble-riggers, dacoits, cattle-lifters, men of fraud and violence of all sorts—since yesterday."

"Why since yesterday?"

"The jail at Afzalnagar was thrown open yesterday—the prisoners released."

"They wanted us to descend in order to rob us?"

"To be sure. It was your sword and shield they wanted. It was a pity the chowdry sahib gave you his best ones. More ordinary ones would have done just as well. And these attract attention and arouse greed. They are so valuable."

Rat-a-tat from one side, the hard sound of the *tabluk*, the little, single-headed hand drum; rub-a-dub from another side, the more mellow sound of the *dholuk*, the ordinary double-headed drum; then from far away the deep note of the *nukara*, the great kettle-drum. Some warning sound, some signal, some call, is passing from village to village. It seems strange to me to be moving through the midst of it.

We have regained the high road to Tulsipore. We move along it, slowly slouching along. We have come to the end of the cultivated tract. It is of such cultivated tracts, of barren plains, stretches of jungle and scrub, the beds of rivers, wide shallow depressions filled with water in the rains, but mostly dry now, that the surface of the land about us is made up of—a wholly level land. So now in due course another jungle appears before us—not a thin, light jungle like the last—but a heavy one having more the appearance of a forest.

CHAPTER VIII

AYESHA

BY the side of the road, a little way within the forest marge, so as to obtain the benefit of the shade of the trees, some benefactor of his race, thirsting for the merit of good works, from the pure well-spring of beneficence within his heart, had sunk a splendid well, wide-mouthed, with a high, handsome, octagon-shaped masonry platform round it.

"A drink and a smoke here, sir," says Zalim Singh.

The well stands a little way off the road, in the centre of a small, square green. Crossing this, Zalim Singh makes the camel kneel behind a clump of thorny bushes, which will afford the beast a bite of favourite food. He adjusts the saddle, which has slipped. I go to the well and take my stand against it; I rest both my arms on the top of the platform, which comes up to the level of my chest, and throw all the weight of my person on them. It is a relief. Looking over the top of the well I see that a little way further on a forest track enters the road at so acute an angle that I can see a long way up it! How delightful the absence of the sunshine, the comparative coolness. All is still. The camel gobbles. All is still again. Then I catch a distant sound from out the forest. I listen. It comes from the road, not from the track. It grows louder, more distinct. The rattle and creak of wheels. Then appears the vehicle—a stately ruth, drawn by a splendid pair of bullocks. It is accompanied by a man on foot, and another on horseback. How will its coming affect me? It need not at all, though the man on foot is armed with a sword, and the one on horseback has a carbine, as well as his dangling sword, for the jealously closed hangings indicate that the vehicle contains women,

women of rank. These men form the escort. The vehicle rumbles up to opposite the well, then pulls up. The peon, the man on foot, goes to the net at the back of the ruth, and takes out from there a *lotah* (brass cup) with its cord attached. The horseman leans forward, putting his carbine down across the pommel of his saddle; bends over it. A gathering. Down the jungle track come four wood-cutters with their axes and bundles of sticks. They also pull up in the road. For the same purpose. While one man deposits his bundle of sticks on the road, behind the horseman, and squats by it, and two others squat down beyond the long-bodied vehicle, the fourth, who carries in his hand a *lotah* dangling from its string, follows in the steps of the peon towards the well. Both are coming to draw water. Shall I maintain my position? Will my disguise stand such close scrutiny? When the men are drawing water they will be within a few feet of me. Should they address me, what then? I had mixed a great deal with the natives, had always tried to speak like them, but could I do so so as to pass muster as one? Had I the right twang, the right inflexion? It was an awkward time to have it tried. But these wood-cutters, these armed retainers, need not necessarily be inimical. I have my sword. It is growing dark; the forest at hand to retire into.

I determine to remain where I am, as I am. I watch the two men coming toward the well. The wood-cutter has caught the peon up. The latter was very well dressed; a fine muslin long-coat, a silk cummerbund, a stately turban with a wide, stiff brim. A tragedy is enacted before my two eyes. In a second—a concerted attack, carried out horribly well—the pretended wood-cutter coming for water has stepped up close behind the unfortunate peon, tilted his hard turban over his eyes, and with a crashing blow of the brass drinking vessel on the bare, exposed, shaven crown felled him to the ground like an ox. The member of the gang seated on the ground behind the horseman has leaped up with a short pike in his hand—he must have brought it concealed in the bundle of sticks—dashed it into the side of the unsuspecting, easily-lounging trooper, and brought him to the ground; one of the other two men takes the bullocks by the head, the other strikes the driver off his seat with his axe. The attack has

been carried out with a dreadful, consummate celerity and completeness. The man with the vehicle, the driver, the escort, have all been disposed of. How the gang worked together! The man who had dropped the peon had flown back to the help of the man who had brought down the horseman, helped to despatch him; the man who had killed the driver rushed back to the same spot and secured the horse, a valuable one. It had all passed instantaneously, my weight still hanging on my crossed arms. I raise them now and rest on my feet.

The curtain of the ruth is thrown back. A girl's voice, soft but commanding, calls out—

"What is it, Rumzan Khan? What is it?" Then two great shrieks. Two girls leap straight down from the high seat to the road. They alight on it only four or five yards from where the three men stand, by the murdered horseman and the captured horse. One of the three clears the intervening space, and cuts one of the girls down with the sword he had just pulled off the fallen horseman. With them as with the murderous Thugs the rule evidently was, "Kill all! Spare none!" The other girl rushes, shrieking, towards the well, the same man after her. He has soon caught her up, hampered as she is in her movements by her enveloping sheet or veil. He seizes the sheet. She leaves it in his hands, and rushes on bare-headed. He is gaining on her again. She passes the well. I throw myself between them.

"*Aynh?*" cries the murderous ruffian, coming to a sudden stop. A whistle to the others, and he leaps at me. He aims a straight down cut at me, and I guard it in the usual manner with my sword; but owing to a momentary indecision as to whether to do so with the sword or with the shield, which I have drawn on to my left arm, and to the use of the curved *tulwar* as well as of the shield being novel, I do so badly. The blows falls on the side of my head, and it would have fared ill with me then if I had not taken the fool's advice and put the turban on. For the next few minutes all I can do is to defend myself. Then I begin to get the swing of the oriental weapons, the shield and the scimitar—as my late host had said, "Need gives use"—and with my superior strength begin to get the bette: of my agile, but lightly-built adversary.

But now another man comes running up, also sword in hand, he having possessed himself of that of the fallen peon. I cannot well defend myself against both, front and side. I press my advantage and wound my opponent, so that he is for the moment *hors de combat*, just before the new man reaches me. He attacks me fiercely; he is a big, strong man; his blows ring loud upon my guarding sword and shield; he presses me close. The wounded man has gone back, taken the reins of the horse, handed the sword to the man holding it, sent him down against me. The odds will be heavy against me. I have my hands very full as it is. Then a shout of "Seize the villains! Kill the robbers!" and Zalim Singh comes rushing out from under the trees, sword in hand, shield on arm. "Seize them! Slay them!" he roars—the exact word—it was the roar of an angry bull; he had a deep, broad chest.

That roar was not liked. A shrill note sounds in the air. My adversary and the advancing man rush back. They leap into the ruth. The man holding the horse mounts him. The man holding the bullocks leaps into the seat behind them, turns them round, urges them up the forest track, the horseman following after. They are gone. It was a wonderful display of quickness, decision, combination, ruthlessness.

We go to the man upon the green; he is dead. We go to the woman on the road; she is dead. We go to the other two men; they are dead.

"All dead," says Zalim Singh.

"Only one of them left alive."

"One of them?"

"She is there behind the well."

"I went but a little way into the jungle to gather sticks to make the fire and all this has happened. Four people killed; you attacked. A new *zamana* (era) this."

As we walk back toward the well Zalim Singh picks up the *chudder* the girl had dropped, that had been pulled off her, I telling him hastily what had happened: "A good ruth?" "Yes." "Good pair of bullocks?" "Splendid." "A good horse?" "Yes."

"And behold her jewelry," he says, as we get up to her, the one solitary one left alive, standing behind the well.

The lingering after-glow was strong enough to display her thick gold anklets and bracelets, her superb necklace.

"Those evil-livers must have tracked them. A fore-planned affair, an arranged attack, a rich booty; they must belong to an organised gang."

She was a very beautiful young girl. Her extraordinary beauty, of which the marvellous black eyes formed the chief glory, affected me even at such a moment as that. I was a young chap then.

"Take it!" said Zalim Singh, tossing her the long veil from a little way off; this out of politeness, he would not come near her while she was naked-faced. She throws the veil quickly over her head, about her person.

"Fear not us," says Zalim Singh. "I am a man with a household, though it be far away. An honest man."

"I fear you not," she said. "Did not he—the other one—risk his life for my sake? Save my life?"

Her voice, a most musical one, well fitting her great beauty, thrills with emotion. The sound, the feeling, thrill my ears, my soul.

"It was nothing," I exclaim.

"What is the condition of the others—of my servants?" she asks, with a wonderful quick change, from sweetness to strength, from gentleness to command, in the tone of her voice.

"All killed," says Zalim Singh.

"All! What all?"

"Yes—all; every one of them."

"What grief! What woe! What loss! Are you sure they are all dead? Each several one of them?"

"Every one of them. Beyond all doubt. The maidservant——"

"My slave girl——"

"She is dead."

"A great loss. Oh, my unfortunate Gulabia!" Her voice broke.

"The driver is dead."

"It does not matter so much about him." It became indifferent.

"And the other two are dead likewise."

"A great loss. They were old and faithful servants. And brave men," she says softly; then quickly, "But being so, how came they to let themselves be overpowered like this? Be slain so easily? Killing none. Killed they any?"

"No. It was by treachery, by villainy, by subtlety and craft."

"He cut one," she says, turning toward me.

"Did you, sahib?"

"Sahib—sahib? What!" she exclaims; but Zalim Singh takes no notice of her exclamation, and I say quickly—

"Yes—on the arm—luckily, or the two together might have been too much for me."

"You fought well," she says in a tone of high admiration. A daughter of the East, with emotions quick and strong and rapidly varying. "You saved my life," and her voice grew soft and tender.

"Whence come ye?" says Zalim Singh. "Whither go ye? Who are ye?" His use of the plural pronoun shows that he recognises her as a person of rank.

"I am Ayesha Begum, daughter of the Nuwâb Wulidād Khan of Biana."

"Wulidād Khan of Biana," the mere names sound as a strain of music in my ears.

"The Nuwâb Wulidād Khan!" said Zalim Singh, the tone of his voice showing the effect upon him of her statement.

"The same," she said, and her voice showed that she, too, set no slight store on the fact.

"Biana—Biana—this is not the way to Biana," then says Zalim Singh.

"No—the opposite. I was going to Jehangirabād to visit my maternal uncle."

"This is a new matter," says Zalim Singh, turning to me. "We cannot leave her here."

"Of course not," I say warmly, even hotly.

"And we cannot go back along this road to Jehangirabād; we have our own journey to make. I am bound to that."

"Only on my account," I say.

"I am bound by the orders of my master."

"If you are going the opposite way to me along this road, you are going in the direction of Biana," says she.

"But it lies not on the road?"

"Three miles only off it."

"We are in haste—great haste."

"The Nuwâb, my father, will reward you well for taking me back. It is necessary that he should know of this occurrence at once, in order to have the bodies removed, the robbers pursued."

"I want no reward," says Zalim Singh: "but our business is most urgent."

"Not more urgent than getting her safe home," I say.

"We could not leave her here as we might a common woman, one more able to take care of herself."

"Of course not," I say.

"And she so beautiful, so covered with jewelry."

"As men, the conducting of her home is our first business now," I say.

She opens the fold of her veil a little, turns her face toward me.

"It will delay us, and my first duty is to conduct you safely to Tulsipore. I am bound to that."

"But you cannot carry out that duty at all unless you first convey her safely to her home, for I will not go with you otherwise. I will escort her home by myself."

I feel those black eyes upon me.

"Of course to me it would be a matter of preference to conduct her safely home. I was thinking of my duty to my master, the chowdry Newal Kishore."

"But who are you?" asks the girl.

"Zalim Singh, a Rajput soldier, just now in the employ of the just-mentioned zemindar."

"Who is the other? There is something strange in his speech."

"From another part of the country."

"We conduct her home," I say.

"If you are set upon it, so. We will leave her at the gate, and then proceed on our way. I cannot allow any stoppage or resting there."

He probably thought there would be danger to me in that.

"I will bring the camel."

"The camel!" exclaims the girl.

"We have a camel—he is seated behind those bushes."

He goes and fetches him.

"We cannot leave those bodies lying in the road," I say, pointing.

"Not Gulabia's nor the horseman's," says the girl.

"To me," says Zalim Singh, "it is inadmissible to touch them."

"I will help to remove them," says the girl.

"Here comes a man," I say, as a woodman with faggot and axe appears upon the scene.

"Thou art who?" challenges Zalim Singh.

"A wood-cutter."

"A wood-cutter—a real wood-cutter?"

"To be sure, and as thou shouldst know, Zalim Singh, for I have taken many a bundle of wood to the *garhi* at Chandpore."

"Thy name?"

"Phutoree."

"To be sure; I know thy squeaky voice. The darkness falls. Remain thou here by these bodies until the men come from Biana to remove them."

"What has happened—people dead—how? who?"

"No time to tell. Remain thou here——"

"And thou shalt be rewarded well," says the Nuwâb's daughter.

"Help me to remove the bodies out of the road," I say. "We may not leave them there."

"I may not touch them, my caste forbids," says the wood-cutter.

"Only certain people will touch them, and only by certain people should they be touched," says Zalim Singh. "They must lie just now where they fell. But guard thou them, Phutoree. Light a fire to keep the wild beasts off. There is no fear about their being disturbed by men; their swords gone there is nothing much worth taking about them."

"Oh, most unfortunate Gulabia!" cried the Nuwâbzādee, stepping up to where the servant-girl lay. "A few moments ago so merry and gay, amusing me in the cart, and now dead. She was a most valuable servant; our own property, our own slave girl. And I had a great affection for her. She was

brought up in our house. She has been with me since my childhood. Of a good disposition and clever. And now dead, slain"; and she gave a sob or two, and wiped her eyes upon her sheet.

Zalim Singh makes the camel kneel. We help the girl into the hind seat; I adjust the stirrups to her feet; how small they are!

"Into the front seat," says Zalim Singh to me.

"No, you; it will be safer for her. I'll walk."

"Mount—mount! I have command of the arrangements. Up! Delay not. Take the nose-string."

Sitting comfortably and browsing, the camel refuses to rise. It takes many strong kicks to induce him to do so. He rises, angrily, with a strong double jerk.

((Acc No: 2139))

CHAPTER IX

ON THE CAMEL WITH AYESHA

THE camel rises with a strong pitch fore and aft. The girl clasps me with both arms round the waist. She continues to do so for some time as we slouch and swing slowly into the forest. The motion, the altitude, are apt to disconcert the novice. She relaxes her soft, close hold, the delightful strain—I am so glad to be of service to her—as the camel moves on smoothly for a while; she resumes it as the ill-paced animal becomes harsh and uneven in his stride. How distinctly I feel each little pressure and relaxation—like a pulsation. Then she removes one arm, but retains her hold with the other.

"Those robbers must have known of my journey and tracked us."

"Yes, it was a planned attack."

"But how did the men of my escort allow themselves to be overpowered—well armed—with sword and gun—one man on horseback?"

"They were taken unawares, and those robbers were so deadly in their stroke."

"You saw it all?"

"Yes," and I describe what had happened.

I felt her sensations along her arm. It was as it were an emotional link between us.

"They killed all three men in a moment."

"And then they killed her. And they would have killed me too but for you," and the contact of the arm grew closer. It was an unlooked-for situation—for me, I mean.

We swing and sway and undulate roughly along. With a

good camel the undulation is soft and smooth, like that of a boat on a gently heaving sea.

"And not in the dead of the night, but in the evening time. Within a few miles of our fortress. Not in the heart of the forest, but at its edge, almost out in the open. Not in a solitary spot, but where all men halt."

"That was why they chose the place," I said; "they knew you would halt there; and also because the forest track bore down on it."

"It was well they chose that spot, for you were there to rescue me; thanks to God, the All-merciful, and to you."

The arm tightens.

"To you my rescuer and deliverer."

Again I felt the arm tighten.

"On the well-known road, within a few miles of my home, halting as usual at the well, sitting unthinking within the closed curtains of the ruth; and then those sounds, the sight of those men——"

I felt the arm tremble, constrict, as if by a will of its own.

"Without any thought of danger, a man on foot with his sword, a man on horseback with his carbine; and then the leaping out; my servant-girl killed at my feet, the running away, his catching my sheet—oh, the terrible moment, well that it flew off!—the feeling him close upon me. I had turned round, I saw him, and then you threw yourself between us."

Her hand pressed me close.

"What else could I do?" I say. "I am standing here; you run by me close; he is after you; I had seen him begin to chase you; I jump in between. What else could I do?"

"You could have gone away; gone away to the camel and the other man, mounted the camel and ridden away. They would not have gone after you. They had come after us. They had seized the ruth and the horse; they would have despoiled me—me dead—of my jewels; got all they wanted. The sharp edge of the sword was stretched out over my head, and you turned it toward yourself; the hand of death was stretched out toward me, and you turned it toward yourself. Eternal thanksgiving."

Her voice trembled, she stopped. Between us was the tie of strong emotion. Somehow I now entered into the past situation as I had not done before. In my big game shooting I had been accustomed to moments of great danger, of peril to my life.

The length of road suddenly darkens, then brightens again: it is the alternating thickness of the foliage. "Our fine ruth gone, and the splendid pair of bullocks, and the good horse, and my box of clothing, costly clothing, and my valuable slave girl. All gone. And I should have lost my dear life, but for you. But who are you? I noticed not the buttoning of your coat—Hindoo or Mussulman are you?"

The Hindoos and Mussulmans button their coats on different sides—one on the right, the other on the left.

"Neither Hindoo nor Mussulman am I."

"Neither Hindoo nor Mussulman—what then?"

"A Christian."

"A Christian! you have become a Christian——"

"I am a Christian born—an Englishman."

"An Englishman!" she cried, and she drew her arm away sharply. "But this dress?"

"A disguise."

"I thought there was something singular in your speech. A Christian—but you rescued me. An Englishman—but you saved my life. Not an Englishman of the meaner sort?"

"No. I am a sahib (gentleman), an officer. I belonged to the regiment at Afzalnagar."

"The regiment of Lindsay?"

"Yes."

"That is why you know how to fight. And you fought well. Splendidly. I watched you. You fought one, and then the other. I have loved to hear about great fights, how our men fought the Hindoos and you Christians. I wished to be a man to fight. I loved to hear about Rustum. You fought like him. You fought for me."

"Delight to me to have done so," I say, "however little."

I feel acutely the removal of the arm, the dissociation.

A little while after it is thrown round my side again. From carelessness, sleepiness, or some inequality in the road, the lumbering beast has stumbled.

"Yes, hold on to me tight," I exclaim, "continue to hold on to me. He is a stumbling beast."

"Then I would rather walk."

"I spoke hastily; beyond bounds. He has stumbled only once, you see. But you had better continue to support yourself by me."

"I think I can sit by myself now. I am getting the practice of it. I will now sit back a little."

Again I feel the disjunction, the taking away of the hand. There is a marvellous power in the touch of the human hand, especially that of a woman. I was young, and the situation affected me.

We move on in silence in the midst of the deep silence. The camel's footfall makes no sound, nor the tread of Zalim Singh's naked feet. There is no sound of the forest, no sound of bird or beast. We are apt to think of an oriental forest as full of life. Very often the characteristic is the absence of life. I have gone through miles of an Indian forest and met not a single living thing, save a wandering wild elephant, perhaps. Often there is no water in the forest, and the trees furnish no food.

In an opening in the wood a great, glowing, circular mound of cinders by the roadside. They have been burning charcoal here.

"We will stop and have a bowlful of tobacco," Zalim Singh calls out to me. "We did not get our smoke at the well. The fire is ready to hand now."

When the camel has dropped down the girl says she will dismount too. She would rather not be on him by herself.

"Only a whiff or two," says Zalim Singh.

We take our whiff or two by holding the stem of the bowl between the second and third finger, and smoking through the hollow formed by doubling the fingers up.

The forest silence is broken by a sound that you hear so rarely in England, so continually in India, a brave sound, the gallant neighing of an entire horse. Far up the forest glade appear two dancing blobs of light. The sound of horses' hoofs.

"Two torches. A cavalcade coming this way. We know not what it may be. Your too good sword and shield and her

rich apparel and valuable jewelry. We had better get into the forest until it has passed on. And not in one large group. I will lead the camel into the jungle on this side; go you with her into the jungle on that. We will come back here when these—whoever they may be—have passed by. The glow will guide us back."

CHAPTER X

IN THE FOREST WITH AYESHA

I TAKE the girl by the hand and lead her in among the trees.

Another neigh rings clarion-like through the forest. The light distributed by the huge heap of embers enables us to move easily among the trees and bushes so far as it extends. I advance into the gloom beyond; penetrate some way into the darkness; then take my stand, still holding her hand, behind the trunk of a huge tree. And now the band of travellers, or whatever else, has reached the charcoal heap; it is clear in our sight, though we stand in the darkness. Instead of passing on, the cavalcade halts by it. Men on horseback, men on foot; the latter carry spears, the torchlight flickers on the points. The torches throw a sharper gleam into the forest, and I lead the girl to a tree farther off, not without trouble from the bushes. The horses stamp, the footmen move about, the red light of the torches wavers and gleams and flashes, disappears, reappears, as their bearers hold them up or hold them down, change their position.

"Perhaps they are going to halt there," whispers the girl. "What shall we do then? How find the camel?"

"They may not; the horsemen do not dismount," I say.

They do not; but now one of the torchmen and two spearmen move into the forest, exactly along our track. Why? What for?

"They are coming after us," says the girl, quickly.

"Hush! cry not out."

"That never."

I retreat with her before the advancing party; not straight; trying to judge of their direction, I deviate from it, taking

advantage of every opening, following my eyesight. Sometimes we have to get round or through bushes, but, mostly, the forest is open and clear, the ground absolutely level, the grass heat-withered down to its surface. We move unimpeded. It seems as if they were chasing us, for they bend with our deviations, push us farther and farther back. Then suddenly the torchlight no longer follows us; takes another direction, disappears. I stand still for a while.

"See you it," I ask low, "the torchlight?"

"No," she answers very low.

"It is gone, wherever it is gone to," I whisper. "We must return toward the ember heap."

"I see not that either."

"No; we have got beyond its glow, but we shall see it soon again. Look out for it."

We began to retrace our steps, not now hand in hand, but closely side by side. We desire to retrace our steps, but it is not easy to do so, from our having changed direction so often. Where is the ember heap? The road ran north. We had gone to the left, to the westward of the mound. But I cannot tell that my face is not turned to the north instead of to the east; the trees are here thick overhead, I cannot see the sky, the stars.

"See you the glow of the fire?" I ask of the girl.

"No."

"Look out for it."

"Looking out for it am I; looking out for it truly."

It is only by catching it that we can be certain of getting back to the place. But the glow extends circularly, towards us semi-circularly, and if we can only hit off the edge of the radiance anywhere we shall be all right. We must be going eastward; and so I push on, and, the ground being level and the forest open here, do so at a good pace.

"Are you looking out for the gleam of the fire?" I say.

"Ever," says the girl, "but I see it not."

We move on. But we cannot keep on in the same line, any way near it. We have to go in the direction in which we can see. Every now and then a block of thick darkness deflects us.

"I see not the illumination," says the girl, quickly, here.

"I see not the radiance," says she, hurriedly, farther on.

There begins to be a tremble in her voice.

"Of course we may not be able to see it from very far off in the forest, though also we may. But we must strike the road, and we should see the glow very far off along its clear open length. Courage. We must at all events strike the road."

That is, in fact, all I hope for now. We move on and on, but we do not come to the road. Has it made a turn? Are we completely off the right direction? Or are we going round and round in the same small portion of the forest, a usual danger in such cases? This seems very likely, for there has been the same utter absence of animal life, the same complete silence, wherever we have gone. However it be, I begin to fear that I shall not get back to the charcoal heap, or to Zalim Singh, my guide and protector, as useful to me in the latter capacity as in the former. That will make a great change in my situation. I shall have to face a new condition of things. What must I do then? I have to conduct the girl to her father's house. I must get him to provide me with means of carriage. But what the chance, now, of my reaching Tulsipore to-night? "None," I conclude.

And soon it begins to seem certain to me that we shall not reach even Biana, the house of the father of the girl, this night; that we shall have to pass the night in the forest. For the girl begins to flag and falter.

"The road arrives not," she says.

"No; and yet we went one way away from it, and came the same way back toward it; it seemed to run straight, I know not why we do not attain to it."

"O Allah, All-merciful, direct us to it!" says the girl.

"Could we have passed over it?"

"No; we should have known it, we should. We could not have passed over it without knowing, here, in the forest, as we might have on an open plain." Then—

"O Allah, the Beneficent, guide us to it!" she exclaims, in a trembling voice. Her spirit is beginning to flag too, as well as her body. We move slowly on.

"O unblest Earth!" she anathematises, as she stumbles on some rough ground. Her fatigue is beginning to tell upon her. She had borne the shock of that tragedy most wonderfully, but it must have had its effect. And of course she is not accustomed to walking.

"You tire," I say to her. "You have lived in the zenana —are a *purdah-nashin?*"

"Of course—what else?" she exclaims. "I am of high rank."

"So that even to be out in the open is a trouble to you. And you have gone through much, and we have walked much. You are very weary, you walk slowly and stumble. It were better now for you to have a rest."

"Truly am I weary, and in my legs an ache. Never have I walked so much before. I am not a coolie woman to walk. I go in my closed litter or carriage."

"Let us rest here."

"I will sit here for a while," she says, placing herself on the big root of a huge tree near.

"Let us rest here for good," I say. "We waste our strength and eat out our heart in fruitless wanderings. Let us rest here during the hours of darkness, in which we should search for the road in vain, until the dawn comes when we could better find our way."

"Oh no, I could not remain on during all the dark hours here, in the forest, no."

"Of course not, sitting there, on that root. But when I said 'Let us rest,' I meant let us take complete rest. Let us lie down and sleep. You are weary and need sleep. Let us lay ourselves down and sleep. It is a favourable spot. The herbage is longer here, the ground not so dusty."

"No, no!" she exclaims.

"What do you fear? There is nothing to fear. If we sleep close together, we need have no fear of the wild beasts, of the wolves and the hyænas, even if there are any about, which there do not seem to be."

"No, no!" says she, rising up. "I dare not sleep in the forest."

"Why not?"

"I dare not."

"Here is a delightful place," I say; "a little hollow in the ground, filled with nice soft grass. We could sleep in it most comfortably—even you. The earth is dry. There is no dew. There is no danger. There has been no sound or movement of wild beasts. All has been silence. Come, tired girl, and

let us lay ourselves down in this nice hollow, in which there is just room for two."

"I sleep not here," she says. "I am rested. I will proceed. You can lie down in the hollow and sleep. I will go on alone, God my Protector," and she begins to walk away.

"There is really no danger, none," I say, as I move after her. "Sleeping together there is none, and you are tired."

"I must continue striving to reach my home," she says. "I must not remain in one spot," and she walks on faster than she has ever done before.

"There would have been nothing to fear in sleeping there," I say, as I catch her up; "but if you prefer to continue the search for the road, of course I will go with you. I cannot let you go by yourself."

If she has shown a needless apprehension with regard to the dangers of the forest she displays great resolution in struggling against her fatigue. She walks fast and strong. Something must have aroused her. Suddenly she calls out—

"Praise to God! I see the light!"

"Where?"

"There—the right-hand side."

"I see. Let us make for it."

It shines at the end of an open glade. We approach it without impediment. But when we get near we see that it is not the dull glow of the wide circle of embers, but the brightly leaping flames of a wood fire. By its side sits, on a deer-skin, an almost naked faquir, with matted locks and dust-coloured body, cross-legged, still, hands in lap: on one side of him the gourd, on the other the long heavy iron pair of tongs, which these mendicants always carry, which are the marks of their profession, which form their only movable possession. The fire burns by the side of a track, but it is not the one we had left, one not so broad, a mere footpath.

"*Bava jee* (Sir Father)!" say I, addressing him in usual native fashion, "where does this path lead to? To what village?"

"I know not. There is only one path I care for," he replies, only just glancing up at us.

"What path that?" I say curiously, surprised.

"The path to heaven."

"Oh!" I exclaim. "Is this your dwelling-place? Here, beneath this fine large tree?"

These jogis, or religious mendicants, these ascetics and seekers after perfection, who believe that there are methods by which they can assimilate themselves to divine perfection, put off the carnal, put on the spiritual, even here on this earth, often retire into the solitude of forests to practise them: take up their habitation there.

"No dwelling-place have I."

"You wander about?"

"Neither do I abide, nor do I wander about. I take no thought in the matter."

"Remain or move as you desire?"

"If I desired to remain, I should proceed; if I desired to proceed, I should remain. I give way to no desire. I have cast all desires from me, freed myself of them. They clog the soul."

"Perchance you have just arrived at this spot?"

"Yes."

"Along this pathway?"

"Yes."

"From the north?"

"I know not."

"From that direction?"

"Yes."

"How far from here did you pass village or hamlet? I wish to get to one."

The girl had seated herself on the ground at once. She was tired; but it is always an immediate impulse with an Oriental. I seat myself by her side. So can I hear the holy man better, see his face better. We are on the opposite side of the fire to him.

"I saw not," he says. "I take no heed of the things of the earth. My eyes are not engaged in outward looking, but with inward contemplation, are ever turned heavenward or to my feet. I move at night to avoid seeing the confining houses of men, the fretful doings of daily life. The day I pass in dark and lonely and desolate places, where there is no disturbance to my contemplation. I seek the infinite calm. As I came hither my eyes were turned downward

on the pathway or upwards on the stars, moving in their harmonious courses."

Some of these stern anchorites are mere skin and bone; move with withered limbs, which they have caused to wither; move like atomies; long fasting and exposure to the elements make of them mere living skeletons: they "put off the flesh," in a very literal and dreadful way. But this ascetic, or faquir, is not like this. Indeed, the very reverse. He has not a dreadful hollow stomach, but somewhat of a paunch; his cheeks are not sunken, but full; his arms and legs not fleshless, but plump and well rounded. He may be some well-to-do man who has only recently given up his life of luxury and ease to enter on the path of perfection; abandoned it for homelessness, disregard of every physical comfort, for complete mortification of the flesh, for lonely contemplation, as even kings and princes have done.

"We wish to get to some village or hamlet, in order that we may ask our way," I explain.

How bright things catch the eye! The girl is sitting in an attitude common among Eastern women, the left thigh lying flat on the earth, the right leg raised with the knee doubled, and the foot resting on the ground; her right arm rests on the upheld knee, with the hand and wrist hanging down loose. So the light plays directly on heavy gold anklet and bracelet, on the large gems in the rings on the fingers. These draw the eyes even of the holy man; drew them even while he spoke of them as fixed on the stars above; drew them even now when he said—

"To me it matters naught which way any road leads. This way or that is all the same to me."

Then he turned his eyes towards me and said, "She looks weary."

"She is."

"Rest you here by this my fire for a while."

The glow of it was pleasant. There was beginning to be a chill in the air. The girl holds out her hand, her small and beautiful hand, towards the grateful warmth.

"We can rest here for a little while," I say to her, and leaning on one elbow, I stretch myself out in a more easy, reclining attitude.

"I am glad that my fire should warm you. The service of man is the service of God. I will replenish it."

Taking the big, heavy tongs in his hands, he rises and moves about, picking up bits of wood, putting them on the fire. I am gazing into the leaping flames, half sleepily, when the girl gives a sudden sharp cry. My quick eyesight, and my sensitive consciousness, inform me of something; I let myself down on my back. The solid head of the pair of tongs hurtles through the space occupied by my head a moment before. The villain had crept up to me noiselessly on his bare feet. I leap up, whisk out my sword. But he is gone—has vanished into the darkness. He had calculated on killing me, or laying me senseless, by that felon stroke. The girl has leaped up too.

"I have often heard that," she cries.

"Heard what?"

"That these faquirs often kill people with their tongs—have them made heavy for that purpose. They are often bad men; pretended saints, real rogues, robbers in disguise. Oh, he might have killed you!"

"Yes, I have heard that too. But I did not suspect him. His words deceived me," I said; then, "Which way did he go?"

"Into the forest there."

"He may be about still," I say, and take my stand by the fire, with my back to the open glade, my face to the forest. "Keep a look-out."

After a while I say, "Well, as we have found a path, we may as well go along it. This is the way northward. I can see the stars now."

I walk with my sword drawn, and when we pass through a dense, dark length of the forest I confess to a feeling of disquietude. I had passed through many a moment of danger, as when meeting the charge of elephant, tiger, or bison, calmly enough. But that was a visible danger, in the daytime. This was an unseen danger, in the dark. And I had the girl with me. He was a powerfully built man. How his eyes had been fixed on the girl's jewels! Then suddenly we emerge from the thick darkness of the close-standing, dense-leaved trees to the brightness of a wide glade, of the unhidden sky, the brightly blazing stars.

And as the brightness of the wide glade came as a shock of relief to my sensations, to my eyesight, so its openness came as a shock of relief to my feelings, to my heart.

When we have got to the middle of the glade the girl lays her hand upon my arm.

"It was well we did not part. Had I come upon that villain by myself worse evil might have befallen me than the death from which you saved me at the well—much worse, ten thousand-fold worse. A Christian and an Englishman. Of a creed and a race abominable. But now you are dear to me. You meant no harm to me in the forest."

"I! Mean harm to you! I am your protector."

"My saviour and my protector. May God, the Omnipotent, shower his blessings upon you. May he be your protector ever. May he lead you back in safety to your own land, and may you there have health and wealth and happiness."

"That is not a star," I say. "That light up there, through those trees, to the right of us."

"No, it is not a star."

"But it cannot be from a torch. It is too high up. It comes from a house, a window."

"*Shukr Allah!* (Praise to God!)" says the girl fervently.

We move toward it. A broad square of light. As we near it we pass through a belt of babool trees, as I know by the fragrance of the flowers, those pretty little, golden-hued flowers which have been copied so many million times in Indian jewelry. But the tree has formidable thorns. Thorns are much dreaded in the naked-footed East. The "thorn in the flesh" may be the cause of much trouble, of long suffering.

The girl gives a sharp, sudden cry.

"In my foot a thorn," she exclaims, her voice full of pain and apprehension. She had lost her slippers at the well.

"You must not step on it."

"No."

"The building is not far off now. I will carry you," and I lift her up in my arms.

"A little heavier than I expected. Put your arm round my neck."

The arm, owing to the under-vest worn at this season of the year being sleeveless, is bare. I feel its close, warm touch around my neck. It has often occurred to me that no man, not even the most stay-at-home, knows in what unexpected position he may not come to find himself; in what unexpected place he may not one day come to eat, or sleep, or die. Three days ago I should never have expected to be carrying the daughter of a Mahomedan nobleman in my arms towards an unknown building in an unknown place.

Getting up to that building I see that the light shines out from a window in the upper story of a large square inclosure, from it issues "the long levelled rule of streaming light." There extends beneath it here only the blank, unbroken face of the lower story. There is no door or gateway here. Shall we have to go round three sides of the building before we find one? We are more fortunate. We find it round the earliest corner.

CHAPTER XI

THE SANCTUARY IN THE WILDERNESS

THE gateway is of the usual demi-vaulted type, but not of a size or grandeur commensurate with the extent of the inclosure. I put the girl down on one of the raised masonry platforms which stand, as usual, on either side of the recess beneath the demi-vault, the gateway being a favourite place to sit in in the East, it is the meeting-point of the separate inner and outer worlds.

Then I rattle and shake the gate, a surprisingly light one. A chain drops within; it is opened.

"*Koun?* (Who?)"

"Travellers. We wish to come in."

"To be sure; come in."

I help the girl through. In the open space before the gateway a lamp is burning, and some coarse wicker-work stools are standing about; beyond show trees and shrubs, the dusky edge of a park or garden.

"We desire shelter for the night," I say.

"Certainly," says this most obliging of janitors.

I conduct the hobbling girl to a stool.

"Fetch the lamp here," I say to the man. "She has run a thorn into her foot. The first thing to be done is to extract it."

He brings the lamp. I lift up the foot, dust-covered, but very small and beautiful. It was lucky I had not allowed her to walk; the thorn had gone straight into the lovely, little-used foot. I draw it out, a spike, a small stiletto.

"*Shukr guzaree* (Giving of thanks)," says the girl from within her veil, which she has now drawn close about her face.

"What place have we arrived at?" I ask. "What village? What its name?"

"There is no village here."

"No village?"

"None; not within many miles."

The reader is aware, of course, that throughout the country-side in India the people dwell wholly in villages and hamlets; that there are no homesteads, no scattered and separate habitations, castles, mansions, seats, farmhouses, cottages, as in England: which indicates long ages of disturbance and insecurity there, as the other indicates long ages of peace and security here. Even the forts, or fortified dwelling-places, of the zemindars, or landlords, always stand in villages. It will be understood how great a bearing this fact had on the fortunes of the English people who had to fly across country then; how much it added to the danger of those flights. It explains my surprise at finding a building such as this standing apart from a village.

"But is not this the house of a zemindar? Who is the master? I wish to see him."

While I am speaking a man whom I had observed seated a little way off, has risen and come up to us. He is well dressed.

"You English?" he says to me, in English.

"What do you say?" I ask, in Hindustani.

"You are a Englishman?" he goes on, still in English.

"What do you say?" I repeat in Hindustani, trying to make it as like that of a native of rank as I can. It is easier to imitate the vulgar gabble of a country than the refined speech.

"Sir, I listen while you talk to this man. I weigh; I perpend; I cogitate; I make conclusion; you Englishman."

"Why do you speak to me in English? Why do you not speak to me in Hindustani?" I say, still in the vernacular.

"You speak Hindustani very well, sir," he says. "Much like native. But I no think you native. Will you say plain you not Englishman, not Christian?"

I could not deny my country and faith.

"I am an Englishman and a Christian," I say proudly, now in my native tongue.

"I make sure. I study in one English college. Now the whence, and the whither. Whence you come, whither you want to go?"

"I come from Afzalnagar."

"An officer?"

"Yes. And I wish to get to Tulsipore."

"You travel in disguise, borrowed plumage. Time of danger, troubled time."

"I was advised so to do."

"Good sword and shield. Clothes not same as common native—same as native of good class. Where you get? When you depart from Afzalnagar?"

"The day before yesterday." (Was it only the day before yesterday? How far back it seemed!)

"And yesterday I passed in the house of a zemindar, and he gave me this dress, and provided me with means of carriage——"

"Where it? Without?"

"No; I was separated from it in the forest."

"And you have native wife. This your beloved spouse?"

"No; she was travelling in the forest, and was attacked by robbers, and we delivered her, I and the zemindar's servant, who was accompanying me, and took charge of her. Getting separated from that servant and the camel on which I had been riding, the girl and I wandered in the forest until I saw the light from this house. I desire now to see the master of it, in order that I may claim his hospitality. I should like to speak to him."

"No one speak to him. Only look at him, and worship him, and make him offerings."

"Worship him! Make him offerings! Is he a holy man, a saint?"

"No; a god."

"A god!" I say, startled.

"Yes, a god."

"Take not the name of God in vain; there is but one God," I say. "But my companion is tired. I suppose we can find accommodation here for the night?"

"Certainly; and for it you make offering to the god."

"I can make no such offering."

"Then, sir, you make payment to me—same thing."

"Who are you?"

"I am the manager for the god."

"Yes—I can make payment. If customary——" I am somewhat surprised at its being asked for immediately—at all.

"Yes, custom, sir. If poor pilgrim come, no make charge. They live outside, in garden, in verandah, in common room; make little offering to the god if like. But if good class people come, want good room, want thing done by servant, then they make offering to the god, or make payment to me. Good rooms upstairs there, sir."

The buildings round the square inclosure are only one story in height, except just in the middle of three out of the four sides, where there is a short block two stories high, the similar position in the fourth side being occupied by the gateway. It was from a window in one of these blocks that the light had streamed out—the guiding light.

"Rooms upstairs got window; plenty air; away from common people; privacy give; no noise, no dust; little smell; got bed to sleep on, stool to sit. Want that, make payment. You want that for her?"

"Most certainly; I want for her the best accommodation there is. But I want her to be placed in the women's apartments, in the zenana, under the care of the mistress of the house. She is a person of rank and quality."

"No zenana here, sir."

"No zenana!" I exclaim in extreme astonishment, marriage being so essential a condition of life in the East. "The master of the house—your master—he must have a place for his wife—those of his household," I say, correcting myself, the use of the word wife being held indelicate.

"He have no wife; he god."

"I like not this speech," I say. "There is but one God. It is not well to use the name of God lightly." (And, indeed, even in the case of our own preachers I like not to hear the name bellowed out, or hurled about, like a child playing pitch-and-toss with Atlas or Andes.) "It is not right to apply it to a man. I approve not of such application."

"But him sit as god, sir."

"How can a man be a god?"
"Oh yes—him what you call one incarnation."
"An incarnation!"
"Yes."
"Of what god?"
"Of Vishnu."
"This is his temple?"
"Not temple. Him not dead idol. Him living god."
"But he stays here."
"Always; never go out."
"Never goes out?"
"Never. Always sits up there, in that apartment."

"Well," said I, leaving that strange matter for the moment, "you can give us accommodation for the night—the best; we can pay for it."

"Yes, sir; all things proper, separate room, upstairs, for you and her."

"Yes, separate rooms—she above, I below. Have you any women here, any women servants."

"Yes, sir, many."

"She will want one to wait on her, to be with her."

"Yes, sir. You know, sir, who the young lady—she is *purdah-nashin*—am? Where she comes from? Where her home?"

"Oh yes. She is the daughter of the Nuwâb Wulidād Khan of Biana."

"What you say, sir?"

"She is the daughter of Wulidād Khan of Biana."

He addressed her rapidly in Hindustani, and she replied to him, and I remarked how different their address and mode of speech to one another was from what it was to me; there is a common understanding between those of the same nationality; from which it is probable that no disguise is ever really a disguise, or so for long.

"Sir," says the manager, turning to me, "everything for this young lady most proper. She Nuwâbzādee. Her father very great man. Live near here."

"How far off?"

"Eight or nine miles."

"Ayh Chameli! Chameli!" he calls out. "Go awake

her and bring her here," he says to the man who had let us in, the *durwan*, or doorkeeper.

"Will you send a man running to let my father know I am here," says the girl to the manager.

"Everything here is at your command," he replies; "but I cannot send a man at this moment."

"Why not?" she says, the quick imperiousness of her tone displaying a habit of command.

"Only for the reason that there is not one to send. The men servants are away at a festival. There is no one here but the doorkeeper and myself, and we cannot leave the house. But a man shall be despatched the first thing in the morning; he shall be told to fly."

The doorkeeper returns accompanied by a woman servant.

"Ayh Chameli, conduct this high-in-place to the upper rooms in the southern block. All the upper rooms for her. And wait thou upon her. Consider thyself her slave while she honours the house with her presence, and see that she has everything that she wants. On thy head be it. Lay the bed well, with clean linen, and get cold water. The first thing in the morning the man shall fly, Exalted One! And may your sleep be good."

"I would speak to you in the morning, because of your service," says the Nuwâbzādee to me from under her veil, and her voice is lofty and distant, different from what it was in the forest.

"At your command."

"I will send for you," and she moves away.

"And go thou, Bhugwan Dass, and prepare a room for the gentleman. You wait here, sir, for a few minutes. He get light, make bed."

I sit down on a stool, and he takes another.

"Your regiment mutiny, sir," he says.

"Yes."

"These sepoys behave very naughty, sir."

"Very wickedly."

"And like fool. Why throw away a good subsistence?"

"They have been misled."

"Much hubbub and fuss now in the land, sir."

"A great disturbance," I say. "And yet you have no bolts

and bars to the gate, I see; only that light chain. It could be burst open very easily; simply by a man throwing himself against it. Have you no fear of robbers and thieves, dacoits? You say the times are troubled, and there is no one here to-night but the doorkeeper—he is not armed, I see—and yourself. Is there no fear for the Nuwâbzādee?"

"No, sir, none. Everyone safe in here. House of a god, holy place—what you call sanctuary. Gate wanted only to keep out animals. She quite safe. And you too, sir. You in great danger for your life outside, sir."

"Am I?"

"Yes, King of Delhi offer five hundred rupees in guerdon for your head."

"For my head?"

"For the head of any Englishman. Make proclamation. But you in no danger inside here, sir; none. Sleep in calm. No one can hurt you. This house of incarnation—holy spot—what you name sanctuary. Here come Bhugwan Dass. Go with him and sleep in peace, total security, sir; sleep like top. Good night, sir."

"Good night to you," I say.

I am very tired and very sleepy, though, to my surprise, it is not so late in the night as I had expected. The wandering in the forest had not taken so long as one had thought. I stumble up, after Bhugwan Dass, to my quarters. I find they have not been assigned me in the same block with the Nuwâbzādee, with Ayesha, but in an adjoining one. I have a top room. Seeing a staircase in one corner leading up to the roof, I close the door leading into the room from the verandah without, put the bedstead against the door, and taking the pillow, mount to the roof, where I shall enjoy a greater sense of security, I think, as well as the infinitely (the heat and closeness of the room below on this night of June, experience alone could adequately tell what it was like) greater coolness and freshness. I take off my shoes and the turban, place the sword and the buckler by my side, stretch myself on the hard terraced roof, near the head of the staircase, so as to hear any sound in the room below, and straightway fall dead asleep.

CHAPTER XII

THE PARTING FROM AYESHA

THE early rays drive me down. A lad comes and says the manager has sent him to ask if I should like anything to eat before the midday meal. I say "yes," and he brings me food. Then I go out into the verandah, and looking down from it, see that the wide inclosure below contains many large trees—these inclosures correspond to the Spanish *patio*—beneath which are many groups of people, faquirs, like the one in the forest, byragis, pilgrims, male and female, ordinary travellers. Honest folk, also dishonest, plenty such, no doubt, in a sanctuary. I like not this concourse, and my skull worth a sum so large—so very large to them. My head feels queer on my shoulders as I look down.

A servant-girl comes and says the Nuwâbzādee desires to speak to me, and I follow her to the neighbouring block and up a staircase to a verandah in the upper story. One end of the verandah has been cut off by means of bamboo trellis-work (which screens from the gaze while it admits the air) so as to form a little room. Within this is Ayesha, seated on a small square daïs, by whose side stands a wicker-work stool. The servant-girl retires and seats herself, like a prudent duenna, at the head of the staircase.

Ayesha's voice is very musical as she bids me be seated, for she uses the soft inflexion of the word which means "Sit ye down," not the one which means "Sit down!" "Be seated!"—a harsh one.

Sitting down, I am now on a level with her. She is enveloped in her veil, keeping only a small loop open with the fingers of her right hand. I can see nothing of her face.

"Salâam!" I say.

"Salâam!" she says from within.

"Let not the beauteous moon remain behind a cloud," I say.

"I am a *purdah-nashin* (dweller behind the veil)," she says; but she enlarges the loop a little.

"Your disposition is good?" I ask, in usual form.

"By your favour," she replies, in usual form and even, level voice. "And yours?"

"By your favour," I say. "It is a warm morning."

"Yes," and she enlarges the loop a little. "Very," and she enlarges it a little more.

"You have not suffered from your foot?"

"Somewhat. It was well that you carried me."

"A pleasant task. The thorn was long, and had gone deep in. You must have stood on it full."

"Yes. The last of your good offices. And your other good offices," she cried, with a sudden change in her voice. How the words vibrated! "You saved my life at the risk of your own."

"Well——"

"Fought those two men for my sake. Delivered me from death there. Fleeing for your life, you interrupted your journey to succour and help me. You kept with me in the forest so that I fell not alone into the hands of that man, that terrible, villainous man."

She shook her veil open. Her black eyes flashed out. They rested on mine with an almost palpable touch, a contact, such as that of loving hands or lips. They hold mine. The strength of the emotion in them makes me feel uncomfortable.

"You saved my life and my honour—my dear life and my dearer honour. It is engraved on my heart!" And she laid her small hands on her breast. "It is written on my soul."

It was a very beautiful face, in tint a light olive, in contour a pure oval; well-formed chin, beautifully-formed mouth, soft, well-turned cheeks, a delicate aquiline nose, indicative, probably, of Afghan ancestry; those blazing eyes, large, jet black, luminous! My eyes express my admiration, take a warmth from her own. Her long-eyelashed eyelids droop. She puts up her hands to draw close her veil.

"Nay, do not do that," I say. A beautiful female face has

always had a great effect upon me. It is a supreme delight to me to gaze on one, as it is anguish to behold one marred by suffering, evil passion, or vice. I spoke fervently.

"I am a *purdah-nashin*. I should not expose my face——"

"Under certain circumstances it cannot be helped, as in the emergency of last night."

"It was pulled off me then."

"Let what was due to force, then, now be due to favour. Under the circumstances of last night you could not but let me see your face. And those circumstances continue. I am still your guardian and protector."

"My saviour and deliverer; my guardian and protector."

She leaves the veil quite open, and throws one end of it over her left shoulder, so that it hangs about her in very graceful folds.

"And will continue to be so until I have conducted you to your father's house."

"My father's servants will soon be here, and then I may never have the chance of seeing you again. That is why I sent for you so early. I wished to thank you——"

"It was not necessary."

"And I fain would know your name so that I may remember it and bear it in my heart. What is your inestimable name?"

"John," I say.

"Jān?" says she.

"Yes."

"Jān sahib?"

"No, no; Hayman sahib—John Hayman sahib."

"Jān Amen sahib," she says.

"John is my name and Hayman my family name."

"I see. Jān—Jān," she says, and certainly the rugged John has a very soft sound in her mouth.

"Jān, Jān," she repeats, and then she suddenly cries out "Jān, mera (my) jān," and she laughs. And then a look of great tenderness comes over her face, and she casts a playful, loving glance at me. For the conjunction of words she had just used means "John, my life"; for the word *jān* means "life" in Hindustani, and *Mera* (or in the feminine *Merre*) *jān*," "My life," is with them, as with us, one of the commonest terms of endearment. "Jān, mera jān," she repeats the words

softly. Then she cries, "How strange!" and she laughs, and then she casts on me—I must write it—a look of warm affection.

"A play on the words," I say, in some embarrassment.

"A pretty play," she says. "And there is another play, "*Jān ne jān buchaya* (John did save my life)," and she claps her little hands. "How good!" she cries with a sparkling look, partly of delight at her own cleverness, for such verbal play is thought much of in the East. "How excellent! How true!" And she casts on me a look of deep gratitude and tenderness.

"You might make the string of words longer," I say, giving in to her humour, "for *jān* also means 'know,' 'know thou.'"

"To be sure," she says, "and you might say '*Jān, Jān ne jān buchaya* (Know, John my life did save).' But that is too long. I like it not. It is for others, not for me. I prefer the first ones," and she repeats them, softly, tenderly, with her black eyes fixed on me.

She was very young, but all this was not mere childishness. We must not judge by the present state of the mind among ourselves. We now deem as mere jingle those alliterative passages in his plays on which Shakspere himself set such store. In the East they would be held of high value at this very day: deemed indicative of great intellectual capacity, of fertility of imagination, of inventiveness: and how delightful the assonance to the ear! There, in the East, if an alliterative line embodies some high emotion, some notable fact, some deep thought, it may come to be deemed divine, be repeated for generations. And many a sacred verse or couplet owes its long-continued repetition merely to its assonance. The effect of that jingle in heightening the Nuwâbzādee's sense of my services, fixing the memory of them in her mind, would not be understood except by those familiar with the East. Besides being regarded as a pleasing play of the intellect it would come to be regarded as a perfect, nay, mysterious and miraculous, embodiment of a fact. Let the reader inclined to deem all this childish remember where the old "riddle," as it is termed, "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," has come to find a place. Let him remember how much of the power

of battle cries, of religious and political cries, has depended on alliteration.

"And what your age?" says the girl.

"Twenty-six."

"You look only twenty."

"Your men look older than we at the same age."

"And of a good person, strong and well built," she says, surveying me.

"We English people take a great deal of physical exercise."

"And of a handsome countenance," she says, fixing her black eyes on my face.

"I am as God made me," I say hastily.

"He made you well. Oh, noble and handsome Englishman, I love you, with all my heart, with all my soul! Return not to your native land, which is now so far. Fear not to remain in this land. Remain at my father's house, and he will give you a high post."

I was aware, of course, that in the warm lands of the East there is rapid entertainment and quick declaration of feeling; but that sudden look—how glowing the large, black eyes—and that straight, open avowal of love! It was startling, preposterous!

"He will make you commander of our forces. You are a trained soldier, a valiant man. You are not married?"

"No."

"And I am not married. We two will be married."

I experience a sensation of hurry.

"It could not be," I falter.

"Why not? Am I so ill-favoured?"

"Most beautiful. But I am a Christian."

"You will become a Mussulman. You will make the Confession of Faith and be circumcised, and then we will be married."

This quite takes my breath away. I experience a sensation of greater hurry, as if I were being whisked through the air.

"You honour too much this poor servant of God," I say, at length, "but there is a girl of my own race——"

"You are not betrothed to her?"

"No, but I hope to be."

"The manager, below, at the foot of the staircase, desires

the sahib to descend to him at once, without delay," cries the maid-servant hurriedly, from without the lattice-work. Ayesha has drawn her veil about her; it was, to me, like the obscuring of bright sun or moon by a cloud.

"I will return," I say, as I follow the girl.

"Not proper, sir. Not proper for you to go up there, sir," cries the manager, when I get to the foot of the stairs. "Not proper."

"The Ayesha Begum sent for me."

"Come away, sir!" and he hurries me straight to the far end of the long verandah.

"If her father's servants find you there they kill you—for sure. Must not remain near apartment. This way, sir. This quiet, retired walk. And now, good morning, sir."

"Good morning," I say.

"What your purport and intention now, sir? Wish to get to Tulsipore, I think you say. How? When?"

"I will accompany the Ayesha Begum to her father's house, and get him to provide me with carriage."

"You can no go to Biana, sir."

"Why not?"

"You get killed there—lose life—for certain."

"At her father's house! When I have saved the Nuwâb-zādee's life: conducted her safely through the forest!"

"Her father very old man; sick; do nothing. Him brother manage everything, and he severe man; hate English people; join with King of Delhi. And, sir, most probable the soldiers that come for young lady kill you on road. Find out you Englishman, find out you Christian; enemy of their religion, enemy of God. Here they am, sir."

We have reached half-way down one side of the square inclosure, and are standing under the block in which dwells the incarnation. We have full command of the gateway, though ourselves hidden by some trees. Through it has come a litter, accompanied by four troopers, fierce-looking men, long-locked, bushy-whiskered, harsh-featured, strong-framed Pathâns from the wild Punjâb frontier.

"Here, sir," said the manager, stepping back into the verandah. "Sit down on that step, sir. If any danger, run up that staircase——"

"They look *budmashes* (evil-livers)."

"*Budmash*—yes. Rob, murder, kill, steal, ravish—do all thing naughty."

"But how could I be in danger from them here? You said that I was quite safe in here, that this was a sanctuary?"

"Quite safe, sir, from all people of this land; but these wild men perhaps think it fine to kill Christian man in Hindoo sanctuary. Better not let them see you. If any danger, run upstairs to room of the avâtar and catch his feet. Then no kill you. Afraid for themselves. I go see Nuwâbzādee off. Move you not, sir."

I sit quite still.

Now the troopers and the litter are in front of the block in which I had just parted from Ayesha. Now they are back at the gateway again, have passed through it.

"She is gone, sir," said the manager.

I had not expected this sharp and sudden parting. I had known, of course, that an everlasting parting must take place when we had reached her father's house; but I had made sure of accompanying her thither, of talking to her by the way.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AVÂTAR

"YOU come and see avâtar, sir," says the manager.

At the top of the stairs we pass into a small, square room, from it into a verandah, or corridor; in the middle of its length we come to a large window looking outward, out on the open country. A verandah such as this, looking outward, is an extraordinary feature. The verandahs always look inward, over the courtyard, as is the case with all the others here. This is evidently a building of a special character. I saw at once that this was the window through which the light that beckoned us had shone. Opposite this open window was an open doorway leading into a small inner room or cell. In this, with a strange feeling, I beheld the avâtar.

On a square wooden daïs, covered with a handsome carpet, was seated the pretended incarnation; cross-legged, hands lying, palms upward, in his lap, in the well-known attitude of the million-times-repeated image of the god Buddha, and on his face, whether habitual or assumed for the moment, dwelt the same look of everlasting calm. He was still as the statue. In his forward-gazing eyes was the same abstraction, the same still, quiet blankness. His features were of the same type as those of the image, but more delicately chiselled, the nose not so broad, the mouth less full. It was a face that might be termed beautiful, and on it there was that transparent, ethereal delicacy and purity that you see on the face of some young nun. Quite a young man; his head, his body, his limbs bare, save for a small, snowy *dhoty* round his loins; the tint of his skin such that he looked like the image of the god carved, not, as usual, in black marble, but in alabaster. His face was close shaven, his hair arranged after the fashion of the image. In person well made.

I had expected to view him with feelings of disapprobation and disgust. There comes over me, instead, a feeling of witchery and amaze, a fascination. He looks so ethereal, so superhuman, so raised above the flesh. Can a man ever wholly put off the animal and attain to the spiritual? Can he ever wholly believe that he has done so? To what extent, in such matters, is there whole truth, half truth, as we know there is untruth? In the case of many of the saints, eremites, prophets, avâtars in India who have claimed, or had imposed upon them, divine, or half-divine, powers and functions and attributes, there is the whole truth, absolute sincerity: in the case of many, untruth, absolute knowing imposture: in the case of most, perhaps, the half truth; half belief, half unbelief; half sincerity, half insincerity; self-delusion. And there were some who might think that extraordinary powers came on them at particular moments; might believe in the part when they acted it before others, as an actor might come to think himself, on the stage, the personage whose part he was playing; as the humble posturer as he displayed his *pose plastique*, and struck an attitude, might for the moment forget his own status and personality, and think himself the hero or monarch he was representing. No man can set his spirit free wholly from its gross tenement of flesh. He can reduce the wants of the body to the utmost, but not rid himself of them wholly. He cannot put off his humanity wholly; but still he may believe in his divinity to the utmost degree possible. Such belief this man had. He was no conscious charlatan. With him it was not the untruth, or the half truth, but the whole truth. There could not have been that complete abstraction of look without complete abstraction of the spirit. There was no high, rapt, spiritual, divine look on the face. There was on it no emotion at all. There was no speculation in the eyes, no expression on the lips. I salute him and turn away. Below the daïs ran a ledge on which the offerings were laid: I placed none on it. I have saluted him, I say to myself, not in his supernatural character of avâtar, but in his terrestrial character of master of the house and my host. But upon me was that strange feeling of fascination. And to the supernatural, the divine character assigned him was my safety due.

In the garden the manager, Purmanund his name, tells me

how this was the fourth avâtar; how the first avâtar was that of a young man found seated on an earthern platform, in this lone part of the forest, who proclaimed his divinity by his superiority to the ordinary demands and exigencies of the human body; who did not eat or drink or ever move from off the platform, never changed his attitude on it; how he wrought miracles and obtained for men and women their hearts' desire; how pilgrims flocked to him, from far and near, and made him rich offerings, so that before he passed away, and in his place was found another, he had been able to erect this building, plant this garden, make that endowment, here in the shape of the rental of many villages, without which no organisation, however spiritual, may live: how when the body and soul of any avâtar were so sublimed that it was evident that his spirit was about to pass back to its divine original, they looked out for a young man without blemish, well-formed, handsome, spiritual-minded, who was willing to be successor, on condition of complete renunciation of the world, the devil, and the flesh; who was willing to go up those stairs never to come down them again; to enter that room never to leave it again; to mount that platform, that throne, never to dismount from it again; to renounce all desire, renounce the man, put on the god: how he was conducted upstairs and left alone with the reigning avâtar: how when the apartments were next entered by others the old avâtar had vanished, the new one found seated on the throne, his face transformed and illumined by a heavenly light. So said Purmanund.

No surveillance was exercised over the avâtar: he had a complete set of private apartments. The pilgrims and worshippers came, chiefly, at fixed periods of the year, on the occasions of the great festivals; at other times there would be no one in the building but the avâtar and his servants, and the avâtar could move about in it as he pleased, if he pleased. And no doubt some of them did so: merely acted the part as a matter of business; remembered how the gods themselves when they came down on the earth ate and drank and frolicked with the maidens more lustily than ordinary men. But there would be others to whom the part would be a reality, who would strive to act up to

it, to fulfil its conditions, for very reason of their hardness, for such aspiration, such sacrifice, is inherent in human nature: he would strive to maintain that position upon the daïs to the utmost, to the killing of the body, as many Hindoo faquirs hold up their arms until they wither: to him the wants, the needs, the desires of the body would become abominable, ever increasingly so; turned away from these would grow feebler, die: the holy abstraction for which he strove would grow fuller and more complete; he would be filled with a divine ecstasy, the attainment of which would be his full reward: the movements of the senses would be lulled; he would be rid of all care and thought; he would grow divine, sit divine, above all things. And such a one, I believed, was the young man above.

"He never moves from the throne," I said, as we talked.

"Sir, common people believe he never move, no eat, no drink. They believe everything. Clever men, like you and I, sir, believe nothing."

"I believe a great deal: all that is in my religion," I said.

"No believe that him never eat. But him leave throne only for two hour in the morning. That true. Remain on it all other time. Him very good young man, think only on God: him *Varamhansa*, that is like God."

"No one is like unto Him," I say. "There is none like Him, none."

"His name Prithvi Dass. Him my nephew, that why I manager for him."

He tells me about the secular side of the matter: the number of pilgrims, the management of the estate, and so on. But I have to attend to my own affairs. I am most anxious to get on.

"As I cannot go to Biana, as I had intended, can you provide me with the means of getting to Tulsipore? Can you provide me with means of carriage, an escort?" I say to Purmanund.

"No, sir, not at this present moment; not to-day, sir. We have bullock carriage for my riding, but it away. Got one mare, but she with child."

"But is there no village near from which I could procure a camel, or a horse, or a pony?"

"No, sir; we here in desert vast and antre wild: no village near. But I reflect upon your circumstance, sir, and I think best thing for you to do to go to *garhi* of Tukht Singh. Him too jolly man; like nautches, dancing, hunting, so on, too much; like music and singing and wine. But him straight fellow—not harmful person. Him well-wisher to English Government. Him take care of you: keep you safe. And can send you on to Tulsipore with guard; got cavalry soldiers: got swift horses, noble steeds."

"Of what caste?"

"Rajput."

"Of a noble clan?"

"The highest, Chouhan. Not rich—him spend too much—but got large estate, many villages. Him bravery, and generosity, and good nature much renowned."

"How far is his *garhi?*"

"About two leagues."

"I could walk there."

"Yes; go in evening, after it get dark. Reach there one hour and half. He give you swift horse; reach Tulsipore early to-morrow morning."

"What is the name of the *garhi?*"

"Oonchagaon."

"But could I find my way to it by myself? Is there a straight road to it?"

"No, sir, only *puckdundee* (which mean little crooked foot-path) through the jungle. But so much better that. Big roads dangerous for you. I send man, or boy, to show you way."

And so it was settled, and I returned to my block, there to bathe and have the midday meal. In the afternoon Purmanund came and sat with me, and I had a long and curious talk with him. He would argue, stubbornly, blindly, foolishly, that in the Hindoo religion was a code of morals as complete and lofty as in the Christian, and that child-god worship, Madonna-worship, faith doctrine, and the essential dogma of the Trinity, were to be found in it too. But our talk did not concern my movements and this narrative. I would only say further, in connection with my stumbling on this strange place, that most of these pretended avâtars move about, preach

a gospel, seek disciples, strive to found a sect, so that this avâtar, silent and stationary, seemed of a unique character.

Evening fell upon the lonely sanctuary. The manager came to me. I put on my shoes, which I had kept off, wound the turban round my head, the cummurbund round my waist, slung on sword and shield. I hand the manager the coins I have got ready for my board and lodging, and my safety; for my mere board and lodging they would pay ten times over.

"You pay, sir, like one gentleman," says he.

We descend into the courtyard, make our way quietly to the gate, pass quietly through it. We find a young country bumpkin standing without.

"Conduct this friend of mine through the forest, whither and as I have told thee. Stand by him in case of danger from man or beast. Mind thou."

"Yes, *lalla jee* (sir scribe), I will. Oh yes."

"On thy head be it."

The manager and I exchange polite salâams, and I move away from the sacred hostelry, from this sanctuary in the wilderness, with a sensation of the same sort as that with which the youth, not yet practised in swimming, leaves the safe security of the bank for the deep drowning water, even though there is no one in sight, and all around spreads the wild solitariness of the lonely jungle. The bank is safe—the water may drown. I had seen several most suspicious-looking personages in the inclosure that day. I had considered whether I had not better remain within the safe limits of the sacred sanctuary until I could have a good escort sent for me. But I was most anxious to get to Tulsipore to see my share of service, to get news of her. If some of those most plainly evil-looking gentry have become aware of who I am and come after me head-hunting—well, I must keep a sharp look-out, that is all.

CHAPTER XIV

I FALL AMONG THIEVES

MY conductor was a tall, powerfully built young fellow—quite a giant: a good escort.

I glance back often, so long as we have the building in sight.

Crossing a small open plain, no man following, we enter a narrow winding footpath leading into a heavy forest. We walk on quickly, and for some while in silence. Then I open a conversation with my big companion. It consists chiefly of questions on my part and answers on his. He seems neither intelligent nor inquisitive. But for me we should probably have walked on in silence. And it may be thought that I ought to have welcomed this. But I had a sort of desire to try my part—to him I was a fellow-countryman—to practise it. And this seemed a good opportunity. My companion is not sharp—rather heavy-witted. In India villager and ignoramus are synonymous. And the large-limbed lad belonged, I found, to the *Gwala*, or cowherd, caste, the men of which are noted for their fine physique (as the women also), due, it is said, to their living so largely on milk, but who are credited also with special mental incapacity: their occupation is held not to promote mental activity. I could not get him to talk about himself, or his home, or his occupation, or the country about. But at last I hit on the fountain of speech.

"You will be returning from the *garhi* to-night?"

"No; not unless I have someone to come back with."

"You would not return alone?"

"No."

"For what reason?"

"I should be afraid to."

"Afraid to!"

"Yes."

"Afraid! What, you afraid? A big, strong, powerful young man like you! Afraid of what?—animals? men?"

"Not of animals have I fear. With this club I have killed a hyæna and a wolf. Nor of men. I am the best wrestler in the countryside. No man has ever yet put me on my back."

"Then what are you afraid of?"

"Ghosts," he says. "Spirits, demons, devils, witches, ghouls."

And then he tells me about the spirits that haunt this forest: the Rakshus (demons), and the Choreils (witches), and the Bhuts (male ghosts), and the Bhutnis (female ghosts), and the Sirens that lure men to their destruction, and the terrible Dund, the headless horseman.

"And there is will-o'-the-wisp," I say, with reference to a gleam of light which I have seen come flickering through the trees.

"Where?"

"It is gone. To the right. There—now again."

"I did not see it," and we walk on.

"There now—it is clear."

"Yes, I see it—but it is not Tola (Robin Goodfellow). It is the light from the fire at my brother's *tanda*."

"What is that? It is a word I do not know."

"It is a cowherd word."

He explained that it meant the temporary pen, or kraal, the cowherds make for their cattle when they take them to feed in the forests at this dry season of the year.

"Your brother has one in this forest?"

"Yes, ahead of us—adjoining this very pathway. We are approaching it even now. We can get a drink of milk there. My brother and another cowherd of our village."

"Your village near?"

"Oh no; ten miles off."

"They seem to have a very big fire."

"They want it to keep the mosquitoes off."

We lose sight of it owing to a sweep in the pathway; catch sight of it again; come suddenly into a brilliantly illuminated glade.

"Why, what is this!" cries the young fellow, stepping back.

I believe he thought the illumination might be due to some supernatural agency. But he soon discovers the unfortunate mundane cause.

"The *tanda* is on fire!" he shouts, rushing forward.

The grass sheds at one end of a long narrow inclosure, whose three other sides are formed of stakes and brambles, are blazing high.

"Oh, brother! oh, Tej Pâl! Where art thou, Tej Pâl?" shouts the young fellow, in stentorian voice.

"Why, what is this?" he cries as, running, we near the inclosure. "Who are these?"

A small herd of cattle and a group of men behind it; that is what I see.

"Who are you that are removing my brother's cattle?" he shouts to the men.

There is a movement among them. They seem to scatter. Some seem to retire into the forest.

"Tej Pâl! Tej Pâl!" shouts the young fellow. The open glade resounds, but there is no reply.

"Ye have not slain him!" he cries, swinging up the heavy club with which he had come armed.

"What madman art thou that addressest us about thy brother and his cattle? What know we about thy brother and his cattle? We are graziers passing through the forest with our own cattle."

"Are these your own cattle?"

"Without doubt."

"Your own cattle?"

"Most certainly. Ours."

"Liars then, and robbers. That pair—and that pair—they are my brother's. Know I them not? He brought them here but yesterday from our village."

"Liar thou, to call our cattle thy brother's. Thief thou, to claim our cattle. Come near and look at them. Look close at them."

The young fellow strides forward. It was a ruse to divide us. When he has got near the cattle the men rush at him from behind them and attack him with their clubs. There is a rattle and clatter of blows struck and warded, club on club. I prepare to run to his assistance. I put my left hand behind

my back to bring the shield round before drawing sword. It is seized; my right hand is seized; the shield and sword are removed from off me. I am standing there helpless, my two hands tied behind my back. They were rough, strong hands, but light, deft fingers, that had so quickly done the work. The men of the hereditary criminal tribes are trained to their special nefarious calling from childhood up. The men had crept through the trees behind me, come up to me noiselessly on their bare feet. I stood there quite helpless, rooted to the spot, for a man had hold of the rope which bound my wrists. I could only look on while the young fellow made his fight. And gallantly he made it. His height, and consequent length of reach, give him the advantage; but he has four or five of the fellows against him, and they are strong, sturdy men, and the crash of the blows attest the strength of the arms. But he has that advantage of height, and a quick eye, and a stout heart, and so he wheels about and keeps the assailants off. Clatter, clatter, clatter, they have all got on him together, but he guards the rain of blows, he gets away, and a tap on the head makes one of the assailants fall back, and a sharp blow on the arm makes another desist from the assault. But their place is taken by two of the men who had surprised and seized and bound me; and again has the young fellow to do his best to keep so many opponents at bay.

"I am a prisoner. I cannot help you. And you, remain not on my account. Run!" I shout to him. But I suppose he cannot hear me; and, in fact, the fight between him and the rievers has nothing to do with me. Clatter, clatter; blow and guard; crack, crack; continual movement; a rush this way, a rush that. Now they seek to get at him separately, from this side and that; but he is very quick, and his arms long, and his blow strong. I never saw a man fight better. And now they gather together, and he rushes at them, and scatters them. He was a giant in size and strength, but it was at the hands of a boy little more than half his height that he met his death. The fight had got down by the side of the cattle; this boy suddenly rushed out from behind the beasts, which he had probably been set to look after, to drive; he got up to the exposed left flank of the youth who towered so high above him, struck him in the side

with a short pike, a deadly blow. The poor young fellow, the line of whose life had crossed that of mine so unfortunately for himself, fell back flat on his back, and the young devil jobbed down on his bare breast time after time.

"He is dead! I have killed him, by myself, all by myself!" shouted the youthful cattle-lifter in triumph. When the man who held, and dragged, me got up to where, stretched out huge at length, the young man lay, I saw that it was even so. He had passed into the world of ghosts.

"I——" began the boy.

"Silence!" said a man with a long grey beard.

"Thou didst it well, my son," said another man; "but let not thy tongue jabber about what thy hand does. Kill and speak not."

"Drive on the cattle," says the grey-beard to the boy.

"But what are we to do with this other?" says the man holding me.

"Kill him," says one of them, off-hand.

"No—not here," says the grey-beard, probably the leader of the gang. "He has good clothes. We may make something out of him. Move on. Double reason now to remove quickly from this spot. Move on."

And I move on with them, captive like the cattle lifted. At the end of the glade we enter a track much wider than the pathway I had been on; we move along it in silence, for a long time—about a couple of hours, I conjecture. We come to a clearance in the forest. Here we find a big fire blazing. Round it are seated two more boys and a couple of women. Near by are standing some pack-bullocks; on the ground lie the packs.

"Mix them with the others," says the grey-beard; and the bullocks acquired are put among the ones possessed.

The men all squat down by the fire. The women produce small baskets containing parched grain, which are passed round, and the men fall to munching it. Water is passed round. Then comes the lighting of the rude hooqas. The women seat themselves a little way off. The boy who had slain my guide seats himself by them and begins to talk volubly to one of them, his mother, for he begins: "Oh, my mother! Oh, my life!" The other boys, who had made way for the

men, on hearing his next words, "This night have I killed a man, a grown man," join the group.

The lad gives the history of his exploit. He holds up his hand to show how high the man's side was; he exhibits the blood-stained pike. "Well done! Well done!" says the mother. "I must try and find thee some sweetmeats."

"And now for an hour's sleep," says the ancient, the leader.

"About this fellow?"

"After we have slept," says the old man, perhaps more easily fatigued than the others. "Tie the rope to a peg. Let the man on guard sit near him."

They drive a peg into the ground behind me and wind the end of the rope round it: I am tethered, as I have seen so many an animal—goat, horse, donkey, cow. They spread two or three quilts on the ground, and on these all the men find room; the women have their sheets; the boys extend themselves on the bare dry earth; the man on watch sits down cross-legged near me, spear in hand. The red light from the leaping fire falls upon the thick tree-trunks, plays among their branches, a sight which has always had a great fascination for me; but I care not about it now. I note with more interest, a deep interest, its play on the recumbent figures.

When the harsh, stertorous snoring proclaims that they are all asleep, it occurs to me that I might try to bribe the man on guard with the money I had about me; get him to release me. But after reflecting most carefully on the matter I come to the conclusion that it would be too risky to let it be known that I had any money about me: it might ensure my destruction. To be sitting there with one's hands tied behind one's back, tethered to a peg, was not a position of exaltation or delight, rather of humiliation and distress. But there was nothing to be done but to bide the issue of events; to trust in Providence, and to safeguard oneself by preserving the equal mind.

After the probable hour or so, it seems to me many, the band is aroused. The quilts are gathered together, the packs and bundles put on the bullocks; everything is ready for a start. I have continued squatting, tethered to my peg. A man unwinds the rope from the peg and says, "And now what are we to do with him?"

As he is speaking I struggle up from the ground; with my

arms tied, and my limbs stiff, I do so with a jerk. My turban drops off.

"Ayh! Hye! What is this?" cries the man with the end of the rope in his hand.

"What is it? What?"

"This man—who is he? His hair observe."

"Bengalee."

"It is a sahib—a sahib!" exclaims one of them quickly, in a tone of great excitement.

"A sahib!"

"A Vilayutee—a Feringhee."

"No."

"Yes. I know. I was four years in the employ of an English family as cow-keeper. He has the face—the expression—look at his eyes; of a dark countenance, but he is an Englishman."

"*Aye Syana!* (Oh, knowing-one!)" cries one of the boys excitedly, running up to the leader of the gang, who was standing near the bullocks, "the prisoner is a Feringhee."

The old man walks up to me quietly.

"Are you a Christian?" he says to me gravely, stroking his long white beard.

"I am," I reply.

"A Feringhee?"

"Yes."

"What about?"

"On my way from Afzalnagar to Tulsipore."

"Good. What are you in Afzalnagar?"

"An officer in Lindsay's regiment."

"He is worth five hundred rupees to us. His head is," cries one of the men excitedly. "The King of Delhi offers that for every English head brought to him. Let us kill him."

"You know what a hullabullboo there is always when any English person is killed or injured. Better avoid that," says another.

"This is a new kind of thing, one not in our way," says the Syana; "it needs special consideration. We must hold a *punchayut*."

He and four of the men seat themselves in a circle on the ground to hold that "committee of five" which plays so large

and important a part in the daily life of the land. In these social tribunals there is often a display of acute debate and vivid, impassioned oratory. Then are discussed things of keen personal, family, or social interest. This present outside matter is discussed in a calm, argumentative manner.

"Let us slay him," begins the man who had suggested the doing so, introducing his motion, "and cut off his head; and let one of us carry it to Delhi, and bring back the five hundred rupees for division."

"If he can get them," says the Syana, the old man. "Get them: that is the point. The king may order them to be paid, and he not get them: shoves and thumps instead."

"But the king has made royal proclamation. By beat of drum."

"Proclamation is one thing, payment another."

"It is ten days to Delhi," says another, a fat fair man, and good-looking—how keenly I watch them! "The head would be rotten, the features obliterated, so as not to be recognisable, by the time it got there."

"It could be packed in brine," said the maker of the proposition quickly. He was eager to support it, I fancy, as his motion, even apart from consideration of the reward: as a matter of debate.

"Delhi is afar," said another man, summing up in the words all the other objections to the proposal as well as those due to distance, for *Dehli dur hy* (Delhi is afar) is a proverb equivalent to the Scotch saying of "A far cry to Loch Awe."

"We should send our best walker with it," adds the proposer.

"He himself might pay us the five hundred rupees if we did not kill him or cut his head off," suggests another; "it would be easier earned that way."

I had been listening to the argument with great interest. I now call out—

"If you will conduct me to Tulsipore you shall have the five hundred rupees the moment we arrive there."

"We have not time for a long discussion," says the member of the committee who has not yet spoken, "or for much speechifying. You are old and knowing, Syana. Speak what is in your mind."

"In my understanding it is thus," says the old man slowly and solemnly. "Keep to your own work. We are cattle-lifters. What have we to do with carrying human heads to Delhi? If you are a crack-crib, be a crack-crib; if a strap-juggler, be a strap-juggler; if a cattle-lifter, be a cattle-lifter. Let the washerman wash, and the dyer dye. Stick to your calling. What have we to do with conducting people? And a promise to pay is air, not substantial, like a bullock or cow."

"You know that I should fulfil my promise, as all Englishmen do. The very moment we reach Tulsipore," I call out eagerly.

"For aught we know the English cantonment of Tulsipore may have disappeared, like so many others," goes on the old man. "And promises, whoever makes them, are not as solid as beasts. We must not risk their loss. Then we do *poojah* (worship) to our own goddess to obtain her favour on our work: let us stick to it. That favour does not extend to other things; they may move her ire. We asked her blessing on our undertaking of to-night, and it has been granted us. The killing or conducting of this person is an outside thing. Let us leave both alone."

"He has seen what happened to-night; and dead men tell no tales," said the fair, good-looking man. The remark seems to impress the others.

"Very true," said the old man, and he reflected. I awaited the result of his meditation with great anxiety. At length he spoke. "I like not the killing of men in cold blood," he said. "That is the business of the poisoners and the stranglers. If men are killed in the seizing of the cattle, in the taking of them away, in the defending of them on the road, that is all right: I have killed many myself: it is part of our work, favoured of our deity. But in cold blood, that is another thing. He can do us no harm. The power of these English is gone. Sir, you have heard what is said. It is proposed to kill you, not for the sake of profit, but in order to prevent you from reporting what you have seen. Will you promise not to do that if we do not kill you?"

"How can I report about you? I know not who you are; whence you come; whither you go. And I have other matters to think of: attend to."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Swear in the name of God?"

"Yes."

"Let us leave him alone."

A deep quiet reigns around as the others sit silent weighing the question. It is a critical moment for me. What will the decision be? Off with his head? Or at all events, as they do not want the head now, a stroke across the neck, a knock on the skull? The silence is broken by the cry of a bird.

"From which side? From what direction? From which hand?" asks the Syana quickly.

"This——"

"The right."

"Then we must not kill him. The omen forbids. And we must not leave him bound—that would be the same as killing him, for there are wild beasts in this jungle. Untie his hands, some of you. The omen has spoken—we must not delay. Come on," he continues, as he rises from the ground. He moves off along the track, a man with a torch accompanying him; the cattle, their drivers, leaders, and guardians, begin to move after him. Some of the others untie my hands. Then, "It is a fine turban," says one, and he snatches it off my head. I had replaced it.

"And a good cummerbund," says another, and he unwinds it from my waist, getting a rich booty, for within it was the gold.

"And an excellent long coat," says another, and he pulls it off me.

"And I must have the vest," and it is removed.

"And I the shoes," and they are taken off my feet.

"And I the socks," says a boy.

I am left with nothing but the pyjamas on. These go too. I am powerless in their hands. Imagine my shame, my horror, my indignation, my humiliation, standing there stark naked before them all. Those who have been in India will understand: there is a special sensitiveness about the matter there: with Englishmen as well as the men of the land. With a roar of laughter they are gone. Close shearers they.

CHAPTER XV

UNCLAD—RECLAD

ALONE, unarmed, naked, in the heart of an unknown forest; a disagreeable situation. But the nakedness troubles me most. It is most distressing to me. I squat down by the fire. I feel like one of the naked savages about whom I had read so often. I rise up, seek a stake, squat down again with it beside me. I cannot do much with that. I may be come upon here by other roving gangs of men; I may be attacked by wild animals. I move off into the darkness, I climb a tree. I reach a comfortable seat, so far as the position of the body is concerned, but I find the bark very rough both to lean against and rest upon. I am not as well provided for the situation as monkeys are. But I propose to move on at earliest gleam of dawn — I shan't be here for long. It is a curious situation, as if I had passed back into some primeval, arboreal mode of being. I had sat up in a tree many a night before, but never in a condition such as this. But still I sleep. I am awakened before the dawn by the tremor of cold in the air which precedes it; I feel the cold the more because of my unclothedness. And now comes the dawn: the world is soon aglow at this season of the year. I descend. I must get out of the forest and make for a hamlet where I can obtain some article of clothing before the sun has risen, flooded the land with his too vivid light. I cannot bear the thought of being out in that vivid blaze, on the staring, open, populous plain, naked. I must get to a hamlet in the dim light; before the world is astir; arrive at it ere the people awaken. Stake in hand I follow the pathway—not the broader track the cattle-lifters had arrived and departed by—another. I like its narrowness; it seems to diminish the feeling of

exposure. By reason of my nakedness I experience, I confess, a certain freedom and lightness as I step along, and seem to breathe the cool, fresh morning air in delightfully at every pore. And I feel not the horror of my nakedness so much in the semi-darkness and envelopment of the forest. But that agreeableness lasted too long. When the trees began to thin the greater brightness was not due to that circumstance alone, but to the greater fulness of the dawn likewise. Can I go out into the wide openness of the hedgeless fields in this bright clearness, exhibit myself there naked, an Englishman, one of the ruling race? Had I not better remain in the forest, where, at all events, there is always a tree to get behind near? This early morning hour is the time for movement and work. Someone will be sure to appear on this pathway, someone coming to cut wood or grass, some traveller.

Oh, joy! A man, one man, single, solitary. I see him on turning a sharp corner—coming toward me. I drop my hands and prepare to accost him. He sees me, gives a yell, plunges headlong into the forest, is gone. What did he take me for? One of the spirits that the lubberly youth—I withdraw the epithet, the lad is dead—said haunted this forest so thickly? Or a naked, wandering madman? Whatever, he is gone.

I will follow the pathway to the very edge of the forest, survey the country beyond, then determine.

The pathway runs into a cart-track. I continue along that. Now it leaves the forest; but it has on either side a row of splendid, ancient mango trees, with massive trunks, low, wide-sweeping branches, dense canopy of leaves. I will move down one of these lines of trees. I creep from tree to tree. All around is solitude, but still I move furtively. I have got some way down it, some way into the open land. I stand still behind the tree I have arrived at, for I seem to hear a sound. Surely the sound of voices? I place myself well behind the tree. Yes, voices—women's voices.

Then arose the sound of singing, of that antiphonal singing which is so common in India, where you so continually hear the men and women take up the alternate strain in the fields. Here the answering voices are those of women only.

I peep cautiously round the trunk of the tree. A small procession of women, bearing pitchers and baskets, approaching

the road, at right angles. They will cross it. No, they turn; they are coming down it; six women, walking two and two, sweetly chanting the antiphonal hymn. Much of the antiphonal singing of the peasantry, especially that in which men and women take the alternate parts, is very coarse. But this, I can tell, is of a devotional character, an invocation to some deity, praise of him. They are making for the forest. They are coming down towards me. I begin to steal back again, toward the forest, from one tree to another; luckily they are not very far apart, and all thick-stemmed. Onward come the women, backward go I. I recede, retire from tree to tree; like a ghost from this one to that, like a shadow from that one to the next. Onward they come, a pretty procession with their prettily-tinted, flowing garments, pitcher on head, basket on arm. Onward they come and backward I go, moving when I think the tree I abandon will hide me from their view. I strive to get away from the procession in the same way that I have so often striven to get near a covey of wild duck.

The singing is varied continually as a new voice takes up each successive verse.

I have gained another tree.

They seem to be quite absorbed in the singing.

I have gained another tree. They move with quick, light, joyous footsteps. The singing is sweet.

I have got back another tree. There are not many more left to the forest, though I have been somewhat slow in breaking.

But now singing all together in triumphal chant they swing forward more quickly.

I have a wider space than usual to traverse. I become paralysed. I remain behind the tree. Singing in sweet unconsciousness they have come up to it.

There is nothing to be done now but to meet them, simply, quietly, honestly. I will step out and face them, and say unto them, "Give me a piece of cloth."

I step out.

I had been thinking only of my own feelings. I had been thinking only how disagreeable it would be to stand out there unclad; it was such an agitating situation. Extremely sensitive in such matters I had been absorbed so wholly in my own

case as not to think of the effect my appearance was likely to have on the women.

It was great.

First there was a stare of stupefaction; then a dead halt, a falling back and tumbling together; then wild cries.

"Throw me, I beseech you——!" I began. But they turned their backs upon me, and with loud cries and exclamations, and huddling all together, went hurrying back along the road as fast as their baskets and pitchers and enveloping veils, and their close contiguity, would allow. They move like a flock of frightened sheep; or, since their cries are as a cackling, and their movement a waddling run, one might say like a flock of geese, as you see them, when disturbed, waddle and quack across a common.

They have not got very far away when the last of them drops her sheet. She turns round to pick it up. I dart forward to acquire the welcome prize. Seeing me running towards her, she gives a wild yell and darts back to rejoin the others, and they scuttle away faster, as fast as they can without separating, huddling together for mutual safety. I swoop up the sheet and dart back behind the nearest tree. I tuck it about me after the manner of the national loin-cloth, the well-known *dhoty*, whose putting on I have learnt. Fit for company once more, I walk back, erect, into the road. But the women have disappeared.

There must be a village somewhere about. I stride down to the end of the road. By end I mean the point at which the avenue of trees stops abruptly where the road enters on a barren plain. Across the open plain I see a village lying on the slope of a mound, the summit of which is crowned by a fortress. A boy is near, feeding some goats. I call out to him, "What village is that?"

"What?" he says, looking at me all eyes.

"What is the name of that village?"

"The name of that village?"

"Yes."

"Oonchagaon," he says.

And when I have got by, "*Koree!*" (leper) he exclaims.

CHAPTER XVI

TUKHT SINGH OF OONCHAGAON

I HAVE reached my destination. In the level plain how high up the sloping walls and circular bastions of the keep appear! Beyond it I can see the water of the lake from which this mound had been taken, which it had helped to form. It had risen up like so many others. The shallow depression of a natural drainage line is deepened, and the earth so obtained thrown across it as a dam: by the building of huts and houses on its welcome elevation, by the melting away of their mud walls, by the accumulation of the refuse, the ashes and the sweepings, cast out from them daily, by the accumulation of the broken pottery, a most lasting substance and thrown out in large quantities, "on the occasion of a death all the pottery in a house is broken," by the accumulation of manure, by the stoppage of the sand driven by the western wind, the dam broadens, heightens, has more houses built upon it. So long as there is human life upon it the process of enlargement goes on, and is quicker than the denuding process of the rainfall. Through many generations the minute but continual process of aggregation goes on, and the big bank becomes a mound—a big, high mound with a fine stretch of water behind it. Then a fortress is set on the fine, rare, safe, high, commanding site, and the process accelerated; a bigger village grows up under the shelter of the fortress, bigger grows the mound until, like the one before me, it stands up a little hill. Or the mound has had its day. The hand of war is laid upon it; the centres of human activity change; it is left bare and solitary, remote, jungle-grown, merely a feature in the level landscape; and then comes the curious archæologist and digs down into it, through the successive

layers of long past civilisations. I do not keep to the track, which leads toward the village, but abandoning it, make a détour over the level plain and approach the clear side of the hillock, the side below the fortress, and mounting up it, make my way to the gateway, before which lounge a group of armed retainers. At sight of me a great commotion among them.

"Hye!" "Ho!" "What is this?" "Who is this?"

"An Albino." "No; a Feringhee."

"But how dressed?" "With a woman's sheet about him."

"Bare-headed." "And bare-footed."

"I am an Englishman—an officer. Conduct me to the presence of the Thakur Tukht Singh."

"We cannot do so without orders."

"Obtain orders."

"You cannot enter the fort without permission."

"Obtain permission."

"I will call Holas Rai, the *karinda*" (manager, agent), says the *duffadar* (sergeant), passing in through the wicket; sign of the time the gate was closed.

He returns, accompanied by a well-dressed man of an acute but kindly and benevolent cast of countenance. I inform him who I am, and how I come to be there; how I had come relying on safe shelter from the Thakur Tukht Singh.

"And that he will afford you."

"I wish to be conducted to his presence."

"I do not know if he is up. Sometimes he rises very early —sometimes very late."

"But I should like to dress myself before going before him. Can you give me a suit of clothes?"

"Yes, English clothes."

"English clothes!"

"Yes; we have an Englishman here."

"An Englishman!"

"Well, not quite an Englishman, but a Christian."

"What is his name?"

"Lurai Sahib. Have you heard of him?"

"No," I reply. "Who is he?"

"A landowner; he owns three or four villages about ten miles from here. He resides at Paphoond, as his father did before him. He, too, has come here for shelter. Enter."

A large courtyard; in an open room, or stall, on one side of the gateway many stands and perches on which sit hawks and falcons; in a similar one on the other side several pairs of dogs, deerhounds, boarhounds; beyond a row of stables containing many horses. In the opposite corner of the courtyard are the cattle stalls, for many cows and black, big-bellied buffaloes are being milked before them.

This is an open, outer courtyard. Beyond that wall, some eight or ten feet high, is an inner courtyard filled with trees; their mass of mingled foliage, so pleasant to the eye, shows thick above the top of the wall; and above or amid the foliage appear light balconies: that must be the inner dwelling-place—the zenana. A quiet reigns around. The whole household is not awake and astir yet.

"This way," says my conductor.

As we pass along one side of the courtyard a strong yet mellow voice calls down from a balcony above.

"Hye, Holas Rai! Why, who is this thou hast got with thee?"

"A Feringhee."

"But how clad?"

"He was stripped of his clothing, in the forest, last night, by robbers, and he had to turn this sheet into a *dhoty*, and I am conducting him to the apartment of Renny Sahib so that he may obtain a suit of clothes from him and put them on ere he appears before the Presence, as he desires to do."

"Who is he? What sort of a Feringhee? Of what class?"

"An officer—belonged to Lindsay's regiment at Afzalnagar."

"Which went bad."

"The same," I said.

"Bring him up here, at once," cried the voice quickly, excitedly, peremptorily.

Going a little way back we come to a staircase, and Holas Rai conducts me to the upper story. All the buildings surrounding both courtyards are two stories high, except some at one side of the inner inclosure which are three; it is to them the beautiful, high-hanging balconies belong; yes, they must form the innermost sanctuary, the zenana.

The staircase conducted us to a short length of inclosed

verandah from the centre of which projected a broad, covered balcony. The master of the house is almost in the same state of deshabille as myself; in addition to the short loin cloth he has nothing on but a plain muslin cap. His legs and arms and chest are as much exposed to view as my own. And very strong arms and legs they are, and a very broad, strong chest, and all very thickly covered with hair; a man of the tribe of Esau. He has a thick moustache, and a large pair of whiskers, brushed backwards. The face was square-cut; a square, broad chin; a mouth full-lipped, but well cut; a short, straight nose; eyes large, jet-black, brave, soft, bold, voluptuous.

"Salâam, Thakur Sahib!" I say, as I get near and make my salutation.

"An officer?" he says questioningly.

"Yes——"

"You do not speak after their manner—more like ourselves."

"I have always striven to do so. I consider it the proper mode."

"Forgiveness. I could not see your face properly at first—I see it now," he goes on, as he returns my salutation. His movements are soft and easy. His eyes make a quick, quiet survey of my proportions—my legs, my arms, my chest—they seem to attract his attention as his had done mine. "He has probably never seen English ones before," I think, as I mark the survey.

"But what! A woman's sheet! How got you that?"

"I will tell you——"

"Yes—tell me, tell me all—everything—from the beginning to the end."

As I came to know, afterwards, the Thakur Tukht Singh had an insatiable love of news, because he had so deep an interest in everything done of men, so passionate an interest in life; as he was, likewise, very fond of listening to the tales of professional story-tellers. He liked excitement.

"Come and sit down here," he says, and takes me by the upper part of my naked arm, as if to lead me to the seat, in reality to feel the biceps, for he exclaims, "Good—tough and firm—not soft." The seat is a chair—the only one there.

Tukht Singh seats himself on a small square wooden daïs, the *karinda* on a wicker-work stool.

"Sit you down, sir, sit you down—and then tell me your tale from beginning to end, head by head. But you would have something to eat and drink first."

"To drink."

"What? Wine? Brandy-wine?"

"No——"

"Sherbet?"

"No—plain water."

"Hye, Kunoujee! Bring the gentleman" (the servant called stares hard at me as if he thought the epithet hardly applicable) "some water to drink—some that has been well cooled."

Notwithstanding his state of deshabille the zemindar moved and sat with an easy dignity—his superiority was apparent, notwithstanding his want of dress, as the inferiority of the agent, or secretary, was apparent notwithstanding his full dress, and while noting this it occurred to me as strange that the agent should remain and take his seat, and form a part of the company, without the bidding of the zemindar. But I came to understand, afterwards, how it was part of his duty to be present at this my first interview with his master. He was the bluff, brave, honest, but not clever, or cogitative, or cunning, or careful zemindar's thinker, and adviser, and intelligencer, as well as his agent, the executor of his commands; he supplied the craft and the cunning, the prudence, as well as the penmanship and the accountantship. The sheltering and helping me was no unimportant matter; might affect the zemindar's interests seriously.

The servant coming back with the water, I have a long, delightful, refreshing drink, and then begin my story.

The zemindar listens with the rapt attention of a child. He followed my narrative with the universal *Hoonhs!* and *Hohs!* indicative of attention (there is always a running accompaniment of these from an audience as they sit round the story-teller and listen to his tale), and also with a series of individual comments and remarks, and personal movements and gestures—now a nod of the head, now a movement of the hand, now a puffing out of the breath, now he clapped

his hands together and cried "*Khoob!* (Good!)" now he slapped his brawny thigh and cried "*Sabash!* (Bravo!)."

"Truly it was the favour of the goddess that saved the house of Newal Kishore—I know him—that night. And your bravery, sir. Many a man would have lain trembling on his bed."

"It was well for the daughter of Wulidād Khan that you halted by the well."

He meant no play on the words; it occurs only in the English rendering of his speech.

"Yes, the villain meant to brain you with the tongs. A stroke from one of them has killed many a man. Thieves and robbers often assume the disguise of mendicants; and the mendicants themselves are often thieves and robbers."

"I know the inclosure well. I have rested in it. It is a pleasant garden."

He was referring to the dwelling-place of the incarnation.

"But I should not care to be the avâtar there myself," he goes on. "No, no, by no means. I am a bird that likes to fly about, not sit in a cage. I should not care to play the part of the god. I would rather play the part of a man. I am Tukht Singh. I like not sitting still. I like to move about, to hunt, to shoot. I like not confinement. I like to move about in the world, go to fairs, visit cities. I could not remain unmarried. No—no—that would not suit me. I like to be married and have a family. I am Tukht Singh."

"I shall deal harshly with those incestuous scoundrels of cattle-lifters when I have established my power in this neighbourhood," he says; "they have carried off some cattle belonging to this village. They should not have left you so naked. It was harsh, shameful. They could have spared you a bit of cloth. It is dreadful for a man to have to go about all exposed—most dreadful."

But when I describe my emergence from the forest, my movement down the avenue, gliding from tree to tree, he follows without exclamation, a smile working on his lips; then bursts into a sudden laugh.

"Ho! ho! ho! Ha! ha! ha! Forgiveness, sir. But it was somewhat of a droll situation. I suppose the morning was now getting clear?"

"Yes, it was."

Then when I describe how I heard the women's voices he does not utter the usual "*Hoonh!*" of attention, but an excited "*Kya* (What)?" The excitement deepens, shows itself in flashing eyes, and working features, when I tell of the walking two and two, and of the singing. "Walking in procession—yes. To the shrine in the forest," he cries. "And what kind of singing?"

"A kind of sacred song."

"Yes—yes—those verses. Ho! ho!" When I narrate their moving down the road toward me and my skirmishing back from tree to tree, there is an explosive "Ho! ho!" but after that he keeps the laughter back behind the tight-closed lips, though it shines in the large black eyes and mantles the clear brown face; he is so eager to hear the story. The sheet before his eyes, around my waist, shows what the end of it was, but when I tell of my stepping out before the women, and of the result of my appearance, the dam gate drops and the laughter pours forth in a flood, with rush and roar, loud, continuous, full.

"Ho! ho! ho!" and he laughed and laughed, shaking in his seat and holding both his sides.

"The Presence!" said the agent restrainingly.

"But, oh, Holas Rai! they on their way to the shrine in the forest, in procession, and singing that invocation, and then seeing the sahib in that condition—ho! ho! ho!" and he bursts out into a fresh fit of laughter. "The sahib in that condition! Ho! ho! ho!"

I drew myself up.

"There is some angriness coming upon the sahib," says the secretary, the Warner. "Over-laughter is not wise; may be offensive," continues the Moderator.

"Pardon me, sir. I mean not to offend you, a sahib, my guest. But I am Tukht Singh. I laugh out loud. And this was such a funny thing. ("Such a word of fun," he said. Word is used by them for occurrence, circumstance, thing.) "And the procession, the women going along the road—to the shrine in the forest—with that invocation in their mouths—and then seeing you—Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho!" And then his eagerness to arrive at the denouement causes him to

restrain himself. "Proceed, sir, proceed—your pardon again. How got you this sheet? I interrupted you. Proceed."

"Oh, one of the women dropped the sheet, and I ran forward and picked it up. She, too, turned back to pick it up; but when she saw me——"

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared Tukht Singh.

"She fled."

"Ho! ho! ho!"

I heard Tukht Singh laugh many a full, loud, hearty laugh, but this was thunderous. His laugh never dribbled or trickled; but now it flowed torrentially.

"Ho! ho! ho! Oh, my father! Oh, I shall die! Ho! ho! ho!" and he laughed until he wept.

"Ahem!" coughed the agent, the Restrainer.

"The woman in running dropped her basket——" I go on. She had done so.

"Her basket——"

"It contained cakes——" They had tumbled out into the road.

"To be sure—the saffron cakes—for the offering. And then——"

"I put on the sheet as a *dhoty*."

"And very well. And after that——"

"I came on here."

"But what became of the women?"

"I know not; they disappeared behind a large field."

"The Jungle Field," said the agent.

"Oh, Holas Rai! We must find out the woman to whom the sheet belongs. This will be a joke for ever."

"But what is this shrine in the forest? What is there in their going to it, that made you laugh?" I ask.

"Oh, the shrine in the forest—ho! ho! ho! You will see the joke of it."

"Forgiveness, Thakur Sahib!" said the agent, "but the sahib cannot find his present condition agreeable——"

"In no way," I say.

"He must be in need of refreshment—of a bath—food."

"To be sure! To be sure! Take the sahib with thee, Holas Rai, and make every arrangement needed for his comfort. It is time for my *poojah* (worship). But we will

meet again, sir. I like your talk—your mode of speech—your look."

I think that Holas Rai was afraid not only that in telling me about the shrine the Thakur Sahib would be led into a fresh fit of uncontrollable merriment, but also that his explanation might be of a kind offensive to myself. For, as I learnt from him subsequently, the idol and the worship at this shrine were of the character alluded to by Milton in his *Paradise Lost* when he speaks of "This shrine's abominations," and "wanton rites," and "lustful orgies," and "the hill of scandal," and "the offensive mount"; worship such as that of Astarte, to whose "image nightly by the moon Sidonian virgins paid their vows and songs," such as that of Thammuz, who lured "the Syrian damsels to lament his fate in amorous ditties all a summer day," and whose "love tale invested Sion's daughters with like heat," the worship of "idols foul."

He rose, hurriedly, and I followed him.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ENFORCED HALT

STOPPING in an open verandah on the ground floor the agent calls out "Renny Sahib!" and a man issues from the inner room. He looks at me with great astonishment. The scribe explains who I am, and how I come to be there, and in my present condition. Mr. Renny extends his hand.

"I can give you clothes and a room. You be my guest. I have suite of rooms from my friend Tukht Singh. The rustics in my neighbourhood become dangerous, so I come in here."

My surprise at seeing him could not be of the same extent and character as his at seeing me, but it was great. I had taken him, at first glance, merely as an ordinary member of the class known as East Indian or Eurasian. And he was a Eurasian, but with a difference. He had only the dark complexion; he was different in look, manner, bearing, carriage, dress. In those days the Eurasians, like ourselves, wore the hair long and abundant, the whiskers bushy and long. Mr. Renny had his hair close cropped, and wore no whiskers, but had a peaked beard and a curled moustache. In his mode of greeting the ordinary Eurasian is eager, gentle, kindly, kindness-soliciting, deprecatory. Mr. Renny, too, was eager in his ways, but in his manner of salutation less loose, with more of a fixed manner, an air of *politesse*, the assumption of an attitude, the placing of the feet together, the drawing of himself up, the bow as he extended his hand. His similar dress had a different air; he wore his collar down and open, and his necktie was tied in a large loose bow with floating ends. He was slenderly built, and of the middle height, the same height as myself. He had a well-cut mouth and chin, and a short, high, aquiline nose,

like that of the Grand Monarque. He was brisk and lively in his ways, but with a conscious air of superiority. There lay the difference. He claimed a superior status to that of the ordinary Eurasian. With all his *bonhomie* his bearing was that of a man of rank. His sense of superiority did not display itself with the "pride in the port and defiance in the eye" of the Englishman; or the solemnity and gravity of the Oriental; in a more lively way; but it was there. A lively man I remember him, and he was most lively in his hospitality. He had his own servants and household appliances in here. His servants wait upon me. He makes me free of his wardrobe, and how delightful, after the bath, to get into fresh-washed linen clothes! We have an excellent, daintily served meal, breakfast and luncheon combined, at which we drink claret and water, after which we have a cup of coffee and the *petite chasse*. He gives me an excellent cigar.

I find that his name is not Renny, but Le Roi; his Christian name was René. And I have to note here what I knew only afterwards, viz. that he belonged to one of those families of foreign extraction, French, Italian, Dutch, of whom there were many in India between the beginning and the middle of the last century. His family had held high office under the Moghul kings; afterwards, on their downfall, in some of the independent native states, where their descendants still held high civil and military posts, besides being large landowners. They held that their allegiance was due to the heads of those states, not to the British Government. And, strange to say, this family, French, had been founded by a prince of the Royal House of France, in the time of King Henry of Navarre. My entertainer had in his veins the high blood of the Bourbons. The family was connected, also, in a strange manner with that of Napoleon Bonaparte. But all that is foreign to this narrative.

After the period of sacred personal aloofness necessitated by the carrying out of the great sacred functions of the performance of his religious duties, the taking of his bath, and the eating of the one great cooked meal of the day (it will be seen how closely this corresponds with our own bath, family prayers, and breakfast), the Thakur Sahib sends for me. He is now dressed. He has in his ears a splendid pair of earrings—rounds of gold wire on which are strung great, uncut emeralds; otherwise

his dress is quite plain: a simple, linen skull-cap, and a long-coat of very fine muslin.

"You desire, sahib, to get to Tulsipore."

"Yes, most anxiously."

"I understand, sir, you are an officer; you desire to be there in order to take part in the military operations."

"Yes, exactly."

"I quite understand, sir; you would not miss the fighting; I understand that. I am Tukht Singh."

"I would proceed thither to-night."

"Most anxious to get there as quickly as possible. I understand. I enter most fully into your feelings. Love and sport, the chase of the wild boar and the tiger, and war, these are the three things for a man. But you cannot get there for a day or two, sir."

Then he proceeds to show me why.

Lawlessness was rampant. Not only had the sudden paralysis of our power let loose the ruffianry of the land, in country and in town, a fact to be borne in mind when reading of the atrocities of the time, but also all the old suppressed feuds and quarrels and animosities—clan, tribal, family, sectarian, religious, commercial. Now one proud Rajput chieftain prepared to settle with another proud Rajput chieftain the long-disputed question of superiority of rank. Kshetri disputed with Kayusth. Shepherd clans rose against Cowherd clans. Now this old landlord of the fighting caste proceeded to get back with sword and shield the villages of which that new landowner of the scribe caste had deprived him with pen and stamped paper. Debtor rose against creditor. Hindoo and Mahomedan renewed the old, unappeasable strife. Vendettas revived. Enterprising landlords prepared to extend the boundaries of their estates, bold cultivators of their fields. All was anarchy and strife.

But it was not that. If one was not prepared to move in the midst of all that one could not move at all. But the way to Tulsipore was barred just now by the position of a large hostile force—hostile to the English.

"It will have moved away in two or three days. For that period you must remain here, sahib. For those few hours you must rest in the shade of this humble roof-tree."

"Your goodness is great," I say. Then I quote a line from the Gulistan, "How delightful to rest 'neath the acacia boughs on the day of travel."

"Well remembered, and well spoken," said the Thakur.

"Spoken with the tongue of a Persian, and remembered just at the exact moment—a most wonderfully apt quotation," said the agent, who was present, accustomed, I fancy to flattery.

"I am fond of the Gulistan, but I prefer the songs of Hafiz," said Tukht Singh, and then he quoted from the song than which no other, I presume, has ever been so often sung, the well-known *Taza-be-taza*—

"Oh, minstrel, the pleasing strain renew,
Ever so fresh and ever so new."

And then the other couplet—

"The last drop in the cup, my boy, e'en Heaven may not provide,
Such flower-fields as Mosellay, Rocnābād's sweet water-side."

He quoted fervently. To the high delights of love and war and the chase, he would have added wine and song, he would have counted the man who loved them not as Luther did.

"And your most honourable name?" he says.

"My name is Hayman."

"Amen," he said, pronouncing it as Ayesha had done. "And your first name?"

"John," I say.

"Jān." His pronunciation of that brought back, sharply to my mind, softly to my heart, Ayesha's foolish, fond play upon the word. "Like our word for life," he says.

"No—John."

"Joan."

"No, that is not it either."

"It is very difficult for us to get the exact pronunciation of your words, as for you to get the exact pronunciation of ours."

"There are some papers to lay before the Presence," says the secretary.

"Well, you must go now, sir, I am Tukht Singh, but this is Holas Rai. But we will have a good long talk to-night, sir."

I do not expect to see him again until night. But he sends

for me again in the afternoon, and asks if I care to join him in his evening ride. The agent is with him still, holding a great bundle of papers. "Would it not be more prudent for himself, for all parties," says the Restrainer, "if the sahib were to keep quietly within doors and not show himself abroad?"

"For all parties!" says the Thakur quickly. "I care not who knows that he is here—I am Tukht Singh. They may carry the information to the King of Delhi himself if they please. In my fortress rest whom I please, and in my domain move about whom I please. But if the sahib himself prefers to remain indoors——"

"I should prefer to go out with you."

"Good." He liked my answer. He preferred the bolder course. And there was a new excitement in having me out with him, the first Englishman he had ever ridden with.

I get the hat with which Mr., or Monsieur, Le Roi has kindly provided me, and we walk down to the stables.

The petty zemindar riding forth on his little mare, heavy with foal, with his pipe-bearer behind him, is a common sight in that part of India. But Tukht Singh was in no way of that order. Nor was he like those rich natives who keep only fat, quiet horses, trained specially for their use, trained to prance and curvet and make a great show in a cavalcade, with no danger to the rider, to move only at an easy amble. He had some such in his stable, for use on special occasions. But he had others fed in the same way as with us, though not quite so fine; another difference being that here there were no geldings, only mares and stallions, the Orientals deeming the cutting of a horse an injury and a wrong.

"You have your choice of all except this one," says Tukht Singh, pointing to a splendid, big, black horse. "No one rides him but myself."

"No one could ride him but yourself," says an attendant.

Tukht Singh smiles, well pleased. The give and take of flattery is more simple and direct among Orientals than with us.

"That one," I say.

"Well chosen. One of the best of the others. But a young horse, and very full of mettle, and somewhat difficult to ride, sir."

"If you do not mind."

"If you do not, certainly."

"You do not keep any English saddles?"

"No; I prefer those of my forefathers. But I can get one from Lurai (Le Roi) Sahib."

Tukht Singh rides out followed by a man on horseback carrying a rifle, and accompanied by a brace of deerhounds, of the Rampur breed, which, with their rough-skinned bodies quite devoid of hair, except a small tuft at the end of the ears and of the otherwise bare tail, look like veritable hell-hounds, and are well named Sheitān and Bhutni—male and female devil.

The young horse is difficult to ride. He feels the different seat, the different—heavier—hand. He plunges and bucks like a Waler colt. But I manage to sit him, to get him in hand. I have ridden to hounds in England, after pig in India. We come to some fences. I give him a new experience by taking him over them. It is a new sight to the zemindar.

"*Shabash!* (Bravo!)" he shouts. "That does not come into our *manége*. It is not taught to horse or rider."

We come to a widespread barren plain on which there are antelope. The Thakur wounds a fine black buck. We have a grand chase after him—the flying deer, the flying dogs, the flying horsemen—a neck-and-neck race; we are in together at the pulling down.

I have dwelt on that ride because it placed me at once on a very friendly footing with Tukht Singh. There is a brotherhood between horsemen (cavaliers) and sportsmen.

And at night we had the "good long talk" he had said we should. I noted down one part of the things he said. As it does not concern the narrative, has no bearing on it, I have placed the memorandum in a separate chapter, which the reader may read or pass over as he chooses. In general, I would claim his close attention.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME THINGS TUKHT SINGH SAID

"IT may be that the sahib has no one higher in rank than himself in his own country; but if he has he may have experienced the irksomeness of the company of superior people, of people who looked down on him and his ways. We have felt the same with regard to you English. You come here and you look down on us, and everything belonging to us: our manners and customs, our religion, our houses and our vehicles, everything belonging to us—'This is Hindustani' is a term of reproach; man, or thing, it is inferior—look down on our families, on our social and domestic life. If the people who think themselves superior are superior, that does not make their company any the more pleasant. With your training and organisation, and long experience in warfare elsewhere, and superior armament, and skill in the handling of cannon, you have proved your superiority over us in war. That does not make the sight of your army any the more delightful to our eyes. You are fiercer and stronger and more cunning than we, but that does not make you better. The tiger is not held the best of all the animals. We do not consider your social and domestic life better than our own. But given the most enormous superiority in everything, that only makes your coming among us the more disagreeable. You make us feel small; you weigh us down; you stifle us. Sir, now, in this time of trouble, I feel more a man. I breathe. I am Tukht Singh—Tukht Singh himself" (his broad chest sounded like a drum as he slapped his palm upon it). "I have use for my brain, and may have use for my right arm too," and he held it out.

"Sir, it is a pleasure to have escaped, if only for a time,

from the fear, and trouble, and tyranny of your native subordinate agency, your native officials of the revenue, and the judicial departments, and the police. Sir, your power was too irresistible. It was wielded by those cunning native subordinates for their own benefit and the ruin of others. They were as tigers, as wolves, as alligators. Sir, you have stopped the depredations of the Mahrattas and the Pindarees, but your native officials and your police came in their place, and we hold them worse. As your power was unlimited so was their greed unlimited. You held the one sword; our swords were useless. A man likes to have the use of his sword.

"Sir, it was humiliating to be in fear of your underlings—men of lower, base, cheating classes. Sir, a revenue *serishtadar* in the collector's office at Afzalnagar was at a fair, where was also a friend of mine, a Rajput of my own clan, and a zemindar, and they had a dispute, and my friend spurned the low-born fellow, and the man said, 'Very well. You have abused me and humiliated me. I will beggar you and strip you of all your land.' And he did. He got a money-lender to prepare false accounts and false bonds. My friend had to pay heavy fictitious debts. He was cast in court. This revenue *serishtadar* and the judicial *serishtadar* were confederates; they had command of the working of the courts; they had command of the collector sahib, who was an indolent, stupid, careless gentleman, as you know, sir, even a collector sahib may sometimes be. Then my friend was unable to pay his Government due, and his estate was put up for sale, and was purchased by that Kait for one-fifth of its true value, and that, sir, is a true tale.

"Sir, in your courts it was all paper and witnesses. With a false document and two false witnesses a man could effect anything. You held the sword, and beneath you came the play of the pen. The pen of the accountant or the money-lender has been more destructive than the pike of the Pindaree, or the sword of the Mahratta.

"Sir, you introduced measures with the best intentions, if not with true knowledge of the circumstances of the case, and your native subordinates turned them into engines of oppression, of humiliation, of spoliation. Sir, you made rules for the protection of female infants, and your agents turned

them into an abominable domestic inquisition. Sir, a nephew of mine, who was educated at the Benares College, has told me how in your own country an insurrection was once provoked by the insulting inquisition of the tax-gatherer into the age of the daughter of an artisan. And here, sir, under these rules was made an insulting inquisition—it could never have been made under any other Government; no other Government was ever powerful enough—with regard to the condition of women of the highest caste and rank, women living in the sacred retirement and seclusion of their zenanas, women who were spoken of among ourselves only with distant allusion; for such women to be spoken of directly, and in such a connection, by low-caste men was an insult—a profanation. Sir, one of the men appointed to carry out these orders came here."

"Ahem! ahem!" coughed the agent, just come in.

"Came here once. He never came again. Why? Because he never went back. I am Tukht Singh."

"Sir, you send out agents to vaccinate the children, and that is very abhorrent to the mothers, and many save them from it by the sacrifice of their honour. That is the fee I have known vaccinators exact for not doing their work."

CHAPTER XIX

EVENTS AT OONCHAGAON

THE next morning there is the excitement of the arrival of Zalim Singh and the camel. He narrates how he traced me out. But his movements have nothing to do with this record. I borrow money from Tukht Singh, who listened to his account of his adventures with great delight, and make him a handsome present. I thank him warmly, and give him a letter for his master. I remember him very distinctly. I could not trace him after.

In the afternoon comes a greater excitement. The news arrives that a large landowner of the vicinity, a man of low caste whose family had risen to power under our rule, who himself had received from us the title of Rajah—he was the Rajah Nund Pal—had made a sudden irruption into the domain of Tukht Singh, annexed some of his villages, and was marching on Oonchagaon. Tukht Singh got ready his forces. The battle took place the next day. It was a good little battle. It deserved the name as much as many an engagement of our own in India and elsewhere, more especially with reference to the casualties on each side, which were heavy. Each force was composed of all three arms—infantry, cavalry, artillery. The enemy had the superiority in numbers; but Tukht Singh had the choice of position. He made his dispositions exceedingly well. The final cavalry charge which gained him the victory, and in which I rode by his side—I on one side of him, and his son, Churrun Singh, a lad of fifteen, on the other—a good six lengths ahead of the men, was made at the right moment and splendidly delivered. The enemy was completely routed, and we captured two of his guns. We returned in triumph to the fortress, the battle

had taken place about two miles off. But the rejoicings for the victory were deferred until the evening of the next day, for which a great feast had been arranged already—a great boar-hunt banquet, at which was to be eaten that flesh for which the heart of man so longeth; it was not the lentil-pots, but the flesh-pots of Egypt that the Israelites hankered after. But that same night the family bard sang the battle he had seen and taken part in. It was a long Homeric strain. How he dwelt on every incident! Now his voice rose high as he told of the deeds of valour: now it sank low as it sang of the slain. I could not follow it entirely; but as it swung along with rhyme and rhythm, it seemed to be a fine piece of improvisation. It was followed with rapt attention. His voice was pitched in a very high key, not only because of his excitement, but for the benefit of the listening ears of the women above. In one verse he celebrates the praises of the Janamen—meaning myself—who had ridden by the side of his master. How the Janamen, Janamen, rang through the place as he sang it out at the top of his voice! Tukht Singh, also, was profuse in his thanks to me. But it was on the following day that I was able to render him the service on which he was to set most store.

For that day a great boar-hunt had been arranged. It was a most interesting sight, for it resembled exactly those boar-hunts of ancient Greece, of which the magic pen and chisel of that land have left us such vivid record. The hunt is conducted on foot, and though firearms are allowed, the high sport is to meet the boar with sword or spear; the highest to meet him with the white weapon, the Rajput weapon, the sword. I had my post, with Tukht Singh and his party, at the edge of the brake in which the pig lay. At the mouths of the other openings from the brake were stationed the other Rajput zemindars of higher or lower degree, the placing of them no easy matter, owing to the keen jealousies—ten Rajputs, says the proverb, need eleven kitchens. The use of the last word reminds me to mention that a zest is added to the sport by the fact that the flesh of the wild boar, killed in a hunt, is the only meat a Rajput of the highest class is permitted to eat.

There is keen rivalry between the various parties as to which will make the biggest, the finest bag. Of course the oldest and largest and fiercest boars count for most. And as there is no

small danger in meeting one of these on foot with sword or spear, the sport is a fine one, though the shooting of a boar is, to the Anglo-Indian pig-sticker, as heinous as the shooting of a fox in England, to the fox-hunter.

Our party has killed only one small boar. We are in a state of great excitement, more especially Churrun Singh, the lad already mentioned, a lad of fifteen, a fine, handsome, mettlesome lad, the pride and darling of his father's heart. A great rustling in the brake. The eager Churrun Singh steps forward. He is knocked down flat on his back. A big sow and her numerous progeny gallop over his prostrate form. There is a great laugh against him. The sport goes on. We have secured another boar, a better one. The beaters are now drawing nigh; the day's sport is near its end. Suddenly in the cattle-made opening appears a huge boar with enormous tushes. Churrun Singh, more eager than ever after his misadventure, leaps into the pathway. Down comes the boar. Well and steadily does the brave boy hold the spear. But the boar is of the largest, heaviest, fiercest. He is wounded, but the lad is down, at the mercy of the furious beast, who lowers his huge head to gash him—rip him open. There is a cry of horror. I am nearest. I leap forward and, giving my full strength to the downward stroke, drive the keen spearhead right through him; through back and through belly, down to the ground. The boy leaps up.

"No dishonour in that, my son," said Tukht Singh, casting on him a look of strong emotion; "thou didst meet him well. But thy life was nearly gone; gone it were if he had gashed thee across the middle. Sahib," turning toward me, "you have saved my son from dreadful injury, most likely from death. It was a good stroke, sir." He takes me affectionately by the top of the arm—"Good muscle that—taut and strong."

Tukht Singh sends for me in the afternoon. He is seated with Holas Rai, and has a heap of papers before him. He asks me about the conduct of the battle, the behaviour of his troops, my opinion of their equipment and organisation. He is about to augment his forces. I ask if there is any further news with regard to the block on the road to Tulsipore.

"None, sir, but that it continues. You are most anxious to get to Tulsipore."

"Yes."

"To take part in the fighting, of which now there will be plenty in the land. Sir, I mean to take part in that fighting too."

The agent gives a little warning cough.

"I may be forced to take part in it, as yesterday. Nay, I will express my thoughts openly—I am Tukht Singh. Sir, I do not mean to play a passive, indoor part in the time of commotion now at hand, but an active, outdoor part."

"Thakur Sahib, forgiveness!" says the secretary; "but it might be as well not to tell the sahib things which it might be troublesome to him to have to remember hereafter."

"And troublesome to me for him to remember," says Tukht Singh, with a laugh.

"The things I see, and the words I hear, in the house of a host are to me sacred," I say. "Least of all should I remember anything inimical to you, Thakur Sahib, to whom I am so greatly indebted."

"You would not, sir, I am sure; there is no baseness on your face, and it is I who am indebted to you; if I had lost my son I had lost all. But all this is a needless prudence on the part of my worthy prudence-commender. Sir, I mean to take a part in this tumult, and when I take a part it will be a big part—I am Tukht Singh. My actions will show large and it will not matter what I did or did not say. Deeds set forth things plainer than words. What does it matter what you spoke when you draw the sword?"

"Thakur Sahib," said I, very earnestly, "I hope it is not against the English Government that you mean to draw it. Better for your son and your house that you should turn it against yourself rather than that."

"You hold the restoration of your power as certain?"

"Most assuredly."

"And yet your country and your own English army are both small."

"Large enough for the conquest of India."

"That was under different circumstances. If the armies of Madras and Bombay join with this one of Bengal, and take possession of all your arsenals, of the thousands of guns and the vast quantities of the munitions of war in them, you

would have an army against you such as you never had before. The Mahrattas and the Sikhs and the great Rajahs and Nuwâbs with their forces might join with it: it would be a great force."

"Thakur Sahib," I said, "you know not the resources of England. Believe me, as a well-wisher, that it would be an evil day for you and yours if you went against the English Government and took side with the King of Delhi."

"Sir lieutenant," said Tukht Singh, "no desire have I to join with the King of Delhi, nor any desire have I to fight against the Company. All I, Tukht Singh, desire is to augment my domain and establish a throne for my son to sit upon."

"Oh!" I exclaim, and the secretary coughs his warning cough.

"So is it, and I speak my mind, my mind and my intention. I desire to change the Thakur, Thakuranee (the title of his wife), into Rajah, Ranee. And if you would remain here, sir, and drill my troops, our success would be certain. I should establish a principality. I have no desire for a kingdom, only for a principality. I do not desire to found a kingdom such as that of the Punjâb, but a smaller state, such as that of Tonk. Sir, you might return to your native land with a splendid fortune, as did Perron Sahib, the Frenchman."

"But you would be seizing some of the Company's domains."

"Sir, the matter stands thus. I desire to enlarge my domain round about here. I take the land from Mahomedan owners; they are the enemies of the Company. I seize the estate of that Nund Pal, who came against me yesterday, an estate he obtained by fraud and from no ancestor."

"But you would be seizing the lands of the Company's subjects, lands in its dominion."

"What subjects and how in its dominions, when the Company's *râj* (rule) has ceased to exist?"

"I cannot allow that it has, and you must not entertain any such thought."

"Not entertaining the thought and not allowing is one thing, the fact is another. Where is the Company's authority here? Does your helpless condition show it? Am I to trust to it for the safety of my house and household? Where are

the Company's troops? Where its magistrates, its police? Am I not to take the power of protecting myself and those about me into my own hands? Where was the Company's power yesterday? Am I not to make reprisal on Nund Pal?"

"The Company's authority will be re-established soon."

"Sir, we know not to what extent this disturbance will spread; it may be all over India. I know not about those distant places, but this I know, that all the portions of this province in which Mussulmans dwell, Oudh, Rohilkund, the lands round Delhi, will rise against the Company, and it will have to reconquer them. It has to retake Delhi, a strong fortress. It has to assemble its forces. Therefore the re-establishment of the Company's dominion, if it ever is re-established——"

"Undoubtedly——"

"That is according to what is written in the book of fate. But if it is, it is plain it will take time."

"Some few months—a month or two."

"Sir, the affair has only just begun. It will be too big a business to be finished in a short time. Sir, I want but half a year or so, not so much, to carry out my design. The seizure of Nund Pal's castle and domain is one part of it. He has attacked me first. In any case during the months in which the Company's power, if not extinct, is in abeyance here, how can I be said to be going against it if I exercise and extend my own? The King of Delhi has no power here; the Company has no power here; I have."

Someone desires to see the Thakur Singh on urgent business. I am given the "permission to depart."

"You cannot go on to Tulsipore at present, sir; perhaps not for a little while. Consider about remaining here until the disturbance is ended, the matter settled one way or another."

There was high revelry in the fort that night. There was a great roasting of meat and cooking of cakes. There was a grand nautch, to which I had been invited, but which I did not care to attend. I fancy the wine cup flowed. The sound of the music and the singing, neither pleasant to my own ears, lasted on until late in the night. Doubtless that great banquet, too, found a place in the chronicle of the family bard, it may be sung of to-day.

CHAPTER XX

THE CALL

THE next morning the household was not astir until late. I had the first little early morning breakfast by myself; Mr. Le Roi was not up. He had attended the nautch, of course. He had looked forward to it eagerly. The dancing girls coming, he had informed me, were celebrated for their dancing and singing and their personal charms. I had never liked these performances, not only because they seemed to me tedious, because neither the music, nor the singing, nor the posturing seemed to me in any way attractive or agreeable, but because of the character and profession of the performers. Mr. Le Roi—who, by the way, had displayed great *élan* in the battle—judged from a local standpoint; to him the nautch was an integral part of the social fabric.

Nor was there the movement I had observed on previous mornings in the vicinity of the private apartments of my host. He is sleeping late, and his sleep must not be disturbed.

I had the morning to myself. I passed it in writing letters in which I brought the record of my movements up to date. Notwithstanding the time at which, and the circumstances under which, I attended it, the boar hunt had been to me, fond of sport, an event of great interest and excitement. Of deeper interest and excitement had been the battle, my first one, with its movements, its varying changes of fortune, its critical moments, its frequent chances of loss of life. So of those two occurrences I wrote a minute account, which, somewhat curtailed, once formed a separate chapter of this narrative; but subsequently, on further consideration, that was placed with the others to be omitted. The publisher rules.

I had just finished my writing. My mind was very full of

the various incidents I had just recalled—the meeting of men in deadly strife; the being under fire for the first time; the sudden ghastly spectacles; the placing of men and guns; the manœuvres, and the tension of thought as to their issues; at some critical moments the almost unendurable excess (it was my first fight) of hope and fear, sorrow and joy; the wild fervour of the cavalry charge which had given us the victory —when all these thoughts and recollections were swept clean away by a sudden event which was to order and direct all my future movements, give a new character to them.

"A man wishes to see you, sir," says a servant, coming in.

"What man?"

"A stranger—a Hindustani—one of the *Kahar* (bearer) caste—just arrived—says he heard that an English sahib was here—wishes to see him—has something to say to him. He looks respectable and is unarmed."

"Bring him in."

The stranger enters. I look at him with an abstracted, half-seeing gaze. He gives a cry of amazement, of trembling astonishment, of fearful surprise.

"Sahib! Sahib!" he exclaims, in strange strained accents.

"What!" I exclaim.

The man rushes forward, and touching my feet, calls out, "It is he! My own master! Jān Amen Sahib!"

"What you, Bhola Ram!"

"Yes, sir. But I thought you were dead, sir. What collyrium to the eyes, sir, to see you alive! Great praise to God. Infinite thanksgiving and praise."

It was Bhola Ram, my bearer, my faithful and devoted attendant and follower during all the years of my Indian service; my confidential servant, who had been with me to so many places to him alien and inimical: Bhola Ram, the faithful and trustworthy; the unwearying, gentle nurse in sickness. Not having had his wife and children with him while the regiment was down in Bengal, he had asked for leave to go and fetch them a little while before the outbreak at Afzalnagar.

"Most strange to meet you here."

"Most strange, sir, forasmuch as I thought you dead. But not so strange when your Honour, being alive, came into the

very same part of the country where my home is situated. But most strange to meet you when I come from them."

"From them—from whom?"

"The wife and sister of Sekunder (Alexander) Sahib."

"What!" I cried, leaping up. Alexander was my greatest friend, with reference to whose sister had arisen the great hope.

"Yes, sir, from them; your great friends at Burkote."

He laid a meaning stress on the words "great friends." I had passed the previous Christmas with Alexander at Burkote, and Bhola Ram was with me then. He had observed what was going on; it would have a deep interest for him, not for my sake only, but for his own; the coming of a mistress into the house would be a matter of deep moment to him.

"You come from them—from Burkote——"

"Nay, sir, not from Burkote. It is thus, sir. I am in the neighbourhood of Hodul, of which you must have heard, sir, the great fortress, to see my brother, when I am sent for to the castle, it being known that I had been in English employ, in order to wait on some English people, state what was requisite for them. I thought your Honour was dead, and when the Nuwâb of Hodul sends for a man it is better for him to go. I go, and lo! it is those very ones—the wife of Sekunder Sahib and his sister. And I tell them that you are dead and they grieve very much."

"Why had they left Burkote?"

"There was a disturbance there. Those very ones—the two ladies and the boy."

"And Captain Alexander, Sekunder Sahib—is he not with them?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"Forasmuch as he is dead."

"Dead!"

"He was killed at Burkote."

Killed! my best friend—he whom I had hoped to call brother as well as friend. My life chum. Dead!

I grasp the back of the chair, speechless. Ah! what does this mean to me? An irreparable loss. And what does it mean to them?

"I have a communication to make to the Presence," says Bhola Ram, glancing toward the servant lad, who had remained within the doorway, open-eyed, open-mouthed. I bid him leave us.

"I have a letter from them."

"A letter—for me?"

"Not for you, sir; for any English gentleman. Strange that you should have risen up from the dead, as it were, to receive it. Strange the ways of Sir God."

"Where is it?"

"In here," and he holds up a string bag.

"In there? I see it not."

"No, sir; and no one would suspect it to be in such an open place."

In his hand he carries a bag made of string in which are his *lotah*, or brass drinking vessel, and the earthenware bowl and the cocoanut shell and the two bits of hollow reed which when put together would form his *hooqa*. With the end of a needle he extracts from one of the reeds a tiny roll of paper, and puts it into my hand. I unroll it. Most minute as are the characters I recognise the handwriting. Some larger-writ pages of that handwriting had been among the most cherished of the possessions I had lost.

"In great danger here. Two ladies and a child. Help. Mary Alexander."

"This fortress of Hodul is a strong one?"

"A most strong one."

"But they say they are in great danger."

"The danger is from within. The Nuwâb Ali Karim is a devil, and his son a greater devil, and the fortress is as a hell for evil deeds. Sir, it is not for my tongue to speak the words, but you will understand."

There came upon me a rush of emotion such as I had never experienced before; a sweep of horror, rage, apprehension.

"I must go to Hodul."

"Yes, sir."

I cross the courtyard, now full of fierce white sunshine, to the private apartments of Tukht Singh. I ask an attendant to go up and say I wish to see him.

"The Thakur Sahib says he will look forward to the pleasure

of an interview with the sahib in the evening, but at this moment he is tired and about to lie down to sleep," says the man when he reappears.

"Go back and say to the Thakur Sahib that if he considers I have been of any service to him in the battle or the boar-hunt, he will see me at once."

"What is this, sir? What has happened?" cries Tukht Singh, his eyes very heavy and sleepy.

"I must proceed to Hodul at once."

"To Hodul! what Hodul?"

"The fortress of the Nuwâb Ali Karim."

"There!" The yawn is suppressed, his eyes gleam. "What for? You will not get sooner to Tulsipore from there. It is not because of what I said about your remaining here?"

"No—it has nothing to do with that."

"There is great danger to you in going there—great danger. You are in safety here. I will forward you on to Tulsipore the moment it is possible."

"I have received a call to Hodul."

"A call! From whom?"

"Some friends of mine."

He stands up.

"Friends of yours! How did they know you were here?"

"They did not know. They sent out a letter to be delivered to any of their countrymen——"

"And the man heard you were here. I understand. They send out word that they are in the lion's den."

"Yes, and I must go to them."

"But of what help can you be to them, you, one man? What benefit to them adding yourself to their number? You would but add one more to the number of his victims. Sir, I speak not with reference to any future services you may be able to render me, but with reference to the past services you have rendered me, when I say, go not there, remain here. Sir, the Nuwâb Ali Karim is now a declared enemy of the English. And for years his fortress has been a den of iniquity, a place of shameful deeds. He is a man of a black heart. Sir, not to him does the suffering, the disgrace, or the death, the loss of property, or honour, or life of anyone, man or woman, matter to the extent of one small damaged cowrie. Sir, it

concerns you not that his profligacy is boundless, shameless; but it does that he is most treacherous, cruel, and blood-thirsty."

"That he is such a one, all this, the very reason that I must go."

"And he has a son as cruel, as bloodthirsty and as lascivious as himself. Two devils in the house."

"Double reason for me to go."

"These friends of yours—how many?"

"Two ladies and a boy."

"What?"

"Two ladies and a child—a boy."

"I thought they were men. These ladies, are they advanced in years?"

"No; both young."

"Both married?" he asked quickly. There is no languor in his frame, no sleepiness in his eyes, now.

"Only one."

"And the one unmarried—how old?"

"Of nineteen years her age."

"And beautiful?"

"In my eyes—most."

"Forgiveness, sir; but is there more than friendship between you and her? Are you betrothed to her?"

"No, not yet. I had hoped——"

"Among you, sir, a man seeks for his wife. Is she the one you seek?"

"Yes."

"Then if I were in your situation and mounted on a horse, sir, that horse's head should be turned toward Hodul."

"I came to ask you for a horse, and his head shall be turned toward Hodul. Can I have the horse I have been riding?"

"Certainly. And when would you go?"

"At once."

"Go you must, sahib. But it is a perilous enterprise. I know not what you can do. He is a villain, but fearless."

"My servant is in waiting on these ladies. With him there and myself, and our relationship not known——"

"Your servant?"

I explain to him.

"Amazing! But these conjunctions happen often, sir. The unknown powers arrange them. They play the game of life, sir. They are like the new situations in a game of chess. Several such conjunctions have happened to me, sir, of which I could tell you——"

"If the horse might be ordered."

"At once: the sun is hot, but impatience is hell."

He gives a man some orders.

"Now, sir, how go you? as you are, or would you put on Hindustani dress?"

"As I am."

"Best. For your arms. You have the sword you used so well in the battle."

"It is too costly—too valuable. An inferior one——"

"Sahib, I call you friend, and with me friend is friend; I am Tukht Singh: my best sword for my friend. And take this pistol and its ammunition too."

He handed me a double-barrelled one of beautiful make.

"Sir, put a cummerbund round your waist, as many of you English people do, and put the pistol in it, and let it never be away from your person in that house of darkness, never; move not anywhere within those walls without it, notwithstanding what anyone may say to you."

He goes to a coffer beyond his daïs.

"There are some gold pieces in it; put it into an inner pocket," says he, handing me a small, embroidered, silk purse, with its tasselled double strings with which to open and shut it. "And I have a thought. While the troopers who are to escort you are getting ready, go and write a letter to the English authorities at Tulsipore, informing them of these ladies being at Hodul and of your going there. Tell Ali Karim of this when you see him. The English *râj* is not quite defunct yet. I will forward the letter by a trusty messenger."

I have finished this. I hurry into Mr. Le Roi's room. He is astonished when I say I am leaving; say the Thakur will explain. I hand him my other letters, and thank him for all his kindness. "Take this," he says, handing me a bundle of cigars. "And this." It was a clean pocket-handkerchief.

Then comes the leave-taking from Tukht Singh and his son. They embrace me after the oriental manner, putting shoulder to shoulder—right shoulder to right shoulder, left shoulder to left. "God shield you, sir," says Tukht Singh. "Take this," say Churrun Singh, giving me the thick circlet of gold from off his wrist.

I am galloping away through the burning, blinding sunshine. I am soon drenched, like my horse, in sweat. But the heat keeps the road vacant. It is a twenty-mile ride. We give the horses their rest at sight of a village on the road, of which there are many, of course, and then gallop through it hard; there is now and then a cry of "A Feringhee! a Feringhee!" "A white man! a white man!" as I and the two troopers who accompany me dash through them, but the only obstruction to our passage is from the pigs, or a stray cow, or a bulky buffalo.

"There is the fortress," says one of the men. We see it from a long way off over a long, open stretch of the arid fallow. It appears and disappears between the recurrent mango groves which, as the trees around the hamlets and villages, are so delightful to the eye. We reach the river on which the fortress stands. This does not run, like the Ganges, meandering in a wide, shallow trough, but straight, in a narrow, deep valley with high banks, a river whose great variation in the flood season does not take place so much in its width as in its depth. We descend to the water's edge and signal to the ferry-boat on the opposite side. We alight and seat ourselves in the grateful shade of the high bank, by the cool margin of the water. How our horses drink! The ferry lies a little way below the fortress, which stands on the opposite bank from us. How I gaze up at it! It forms the central and culminating feature of a very fine view. But that is not why I look up at it. There is here a prospect finer than any I have seen for a long time past; the curving wooded banks with the margin of tender green at their feet, the wide-flowing, sparkling river between, and in the middle of the fine sweep of wood and water, above a length of almost perpendicular but still shrub-clad bank, the various-height walls, and the massive circular bastions, with the fine line of buildings above, of Hodul Fort and Castle, a splendid scene. But that is not why I gaze at

it. From the delightfulness of the situation, the example of other places, those upper buildings must form the palace portion of the huge fortress. And how graceful they are, with their floating domes and cupolas, their stone-latticed windows, and projecting balconies; how beautiful the contrast between their airy grace and the massive strength of the battlements and bastions below! But that is not why my eyes are fixed on them. It is because *they* may be there; in that apartment on the bastion; in that one resting on the adjoining battlement.

And the two troopers talk.

"Strong walls!"

"Yes; the King's forces came against it often, but never could take it."

The fortress stood in the former Kingdom, now Province, of Oudh.

"No; it is protected also by the thick bamboo jungle round it."

"And the Nuwâb, if a man of evil deeds, is a good general, fearless, and full of strategy."

"Many underground dungeons and secret passages in it, they say."

"But a man of evil deeds. Having no fear of God or man. Robbing and murdering all around. Depriving men of their lands, their goods, their wives and children, their lives."

"Men have disappeared into them and never been heard of again."

"A ruthless man."

"Some they say put alive into the tiger's cage."

"The fame of his iniquity has gone through all the land."

"Like an evil odour."

The ferry-boat has arrived, and we cross. So much as a mile beyond the river we come to the road to the castle, and turn down it. It passes first through a belt of the black-stemmed acacias with their cruel thorns. Then comes the belt of bamboos, the real defensive wood, and a most formidable one; the serried ranks of the close-standing tough stems of the gigantic reeds present an almost solid barrier, one impossible to force one's way through—a hundred of those tough stems would have to be cut to procure the same amount of

opening as that made by the felling of a single tree. The road wound and twisted, had many a sudden stop and turning for purpose of defence. (Here it was, in the succeeding year, that our troops—our own best English troops—met with a most disastrous and bloody repulse.) I was never in so strange a wood. The atmosphere was stifling; of a dull yellow tint. Up to the edge of it deep silence; within it a voice; a sound without a stir in the air, a faint indistinct murmur, as it were the ghost of a sound, no substance, though its presence was felt. I suppose between the burning high land and the cooler hollow of the river there was some movement in the upper region of the air which affected the long light feathery fronds and caused them to move against one another. It was strange to be in the midst of the innumerable slender, lofty, perpendicular stems, and see no branch or leaves.

The wood does not extend up to the walls. Immediately under these an open space. As we appear on this we are challenged from the massive gateway. "An English officer," I reply, as we ride up to it. There is a great commotion among the men of the guard, most of whom have been lying about asleep.

I dismount.

"You have your orders about taking the horse back," I say to the troopers.

"Yes."

"You can go."

They have disappeared into the wood. I am left standing before the gateway.

There appears in the gateway a stout, bow-legged, grey-haired, grey-bearded man with a huge green turban, a Hubshi, or Abyssinian, by his face, who glances from the disappearing horsemen to me and exclaims, "What!"

"I am an English officer. I desire to see the Nuwâb Ali Karim."

"Why did you let him place himself here?" says the stout man to the men of the guard.

"How could we help it?"

"We can redeem the fault by putting a bullet through him."

"No, no, no. But it is very troublesome. I know not how

the Ocean of Benevolence may take it when I convey the information to him."

The Ocean of Benevolence was subject to sudden and destructive upheavals, his troubled tone told.

"Truly, O most exalted chamberlain!" I said, "for my being here no one is responsible but myself. And I see no harm in it. Convey the information to the Nuwâb and say that I desire an immediate interview of him."

"Most disturbing," says the old man, whose position I had inferred from his handsome dress, his big turban and voluminous sash.

"Oh, Haji Nuboos," says one of the men, "the Fountain of Goodness may or may not be moved to anger by the nature of the information, but is sure to be by delay in conveying it. Thou hast better go at once."

"Truly he is the Sea of Beneficence and the Fountain of Goodwill, and if equal to Roostum in valour so equal to Hatim Tai in hospitality—but still—but still—the receiving of this man—— However, I have to inform him."

He departs with a slow, consequential waddle.

I hear certain opprobrious epithets, but I pretend not to hear.

The chamberlain reappears and beckons to me, and I enter the famed, the evil-famed, fortress.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NUWÂB ALI KARIM

WE enter a very spacious courtyard and cross it, obliquely, to a small gate in an inner cross wall, through which we pass into another large inclosure—a pleasance, an orchard, grove, and flower garden all in one. And here, at this end, is a small menagerie; birds in cages hanging from the trees; water-fowl on a pond; storks stalking about; elk and deer in paddocks; a chained rhinoceros; all the fierce wild beasts—wolves, hyænas, leopards, a lynx, a bear, a panther, and here, in his man-high cage, an enormous Bengal tiger, larger than any I had ever shot or seen. And glancing through the bars there rose up before my mind's eye the dreadful spectacle of a poor wretch cowering there in his agony, at the mercy of that terrible beast, he roaring in the mad delight of his possession, in the furious joy of his power, the greed of his maw. And I was about to see the man who had devoted his fellow-man to that fate, for some ruffling of his temper, for some righteous resistance to his will. This end of the inclosure is formed of a two-storied building with a handsome arcade below. In the middle of the length of the latter we come to a heavy door, now open, which closes this end of a long cross corridor with a similar door at the other end, which serves as a guardroom, as shown by the weapons on the walls, by the swordsman sitting on guard at the inner door. Passing through this guardroom corridor, we enter another, but more beautiful and ornate, cloister or arcade, with beautiful slender columns and fretted Moorish arches, one of the four which surround a small, square, inner garden, whose beds were of pretty geometrical patterns formed by the intersecting of the narrow, winding paths of white marble, and in whose

corners were masses of shrubs and fruit trees, laurels, oleanders, orange and lemon trees, while above the arcades were pretty balconies and windows filled with exquisite marble lace-work.

Advancing up the hall into which I am conducted, one glance to its splendour, one thought to the fact that the dignity and repose and coolness of its spaciousness is not spoiled by over-furnishing, for in it is but a long divan against one wall, two or three seats, a daïs, one only, for on the daïs sits the Nuwâb.

He is different from what I had expected; he is no burly, coarse, fierce-faced man. A man of the middle height, of ordinary shape and size, not handsome, but not ill-looking. Many a long year after, standing in a picture-gallery in Italy, before the portrait of a celebrated Venetian painter, there arose within me a sudden turmoil of thought and feeling, for the face recalled to me, after long searching back, the face of the Nuwâb Ali Karim; the same long, straight, well-formed, but thickish, nose; the same not wide, yet large mouth, with full and voluptuous, but well-cut, firm-set lips; the same loose hanging hair; the same concentration of the projection of the forehead in a knot between the eyes; the same large, deep vault of the eyes, with the same large black orbs in them; the same width of cheek-bone, giving a square look to the face. The difference was, I had expected to see a Boar of Ardennes, and saw a Borgia.

He reclined against silken cushions in an attitude of voluptuous ease, while from between his *paun*-stained lips curled up a cloud of the highly scented tobacco, and over him passed the breeze from the large palm-leaf fan which the pretty page-boy near the daïs was waving. About him, clad in his soft silken raiment, a boastful vanity, an extravagant coxcombry, a braggadocio ease, a braggart lordliness.

"That Feringhee," said the Abyssinian.

"Oh," said the Nuwâb, with a disdainful half-glance, a turning away of the head, an access of lordliness, of luxurious abandonment.

I remain standing, he reclining, looking the other way. I remain standing, while he looks away, dangles, with loose wrist, the beautifully chased silver mouthpiece at the end of the long velvet-covered tube of the hooqa, stretches out his naked

feet, lifts up a silken handkerchief. The chamberlain, or major-domo, and the pretty page-boy form the admiring audience while he "assumes the god."

Then he turns upon me eyes of an exaggerated carelessness and indifference, scans me, superciliously, up and down.

Transformation in look and attitude ; a quick drawing up of the feet, a rigidity in the frame. His eyes have fallen on the butt end of my pistol. A fierce glance at my introducer.

"Chair," he says.

The broad-beamed, bow-legged man waddles away on now trembling legs, and fetches me one of the gilt and lacquered chairs.

The Nuwâb has raised himself out of his reclining position of disadvantage. He has pushed aside, as if carelessly, the discarded cummerbund lying near him, so giving to view the long ivory-handled stiletto he wears in it. He now returns the salute I had made him with a graceful waving of the hand.

"Whence come you?"

"From the *garhi* of the Thakur Tukht Singh."

"Oonchagaon."

"Yes."

"Where going?"

"To Tulsipore."

"What turned your steps this way? What stoppage? This is not on the road between the two places."

"No stoppage. I came here direct—of intention."

"Wherefore?"

"Because some friends of mine are here."

"Some friends of yours?"

"Two ladies and a child."

Once in my shooting I looked down on a tigress lying on a ledge, supine, loose, inattentive, lax ; then the sudden sense of danger near she leaped up and stood with every muscle taut : such the change in the Nuwâb ; he sat up stiff, head upheld, shoulders square, broad chest out, arms stiffened. No longer the careless, supercilious glance, but an intent, fierce regard. Nor was he the only one whom my words affected. The chamberlain shuffled on his short bow legs. The page-boy ceased his fanning as he gazed at me wide-eyed, then resumed it furiously.

"Son of hell!" said the Nuwâb, "now thou stoppest fanning, and then thou fannest hard enough to blow one's head off. If thou art not more careful——" He said no more. The lad shook on his feet.

"Who conveyed to you the information that they were here? Who made such an assertion?" the Nuwâb says, turning toward me.

"The outbreak at Burkote, the death of Captain Alexander, the flight of his wife and sister and child, and their finding refuge here, are no hidden things. I turned out of my way in order that I might take them on with me to Tulsipore."

"What your means of carriage? I was not told of this," and he looked fiercely at the Abyssinian; "was told that you had sent away your horse and the two men who accompanied you."

"Yes, because I knew that the means of carriage must be abundant here."

"And available?"

"Yes, because of the abundance. And in passing across the outer courtyard just now I observed that abundance—carriages, horses, elephants."

"Truly God has blessed our store; to Him all praise."

"And I would ask that the means of carriage and an escort may be provided for the ladies and myself this evening, so that we may be able to reach Tulsipore early to-morrow morning, when our friends expect us."

"Your friends expect you——"

"Yes. I have written to the chief civil and military authorities at Tulsipore to say that these ladies are here, that I have come here for them, will bring them on with me. It is but a night's journey from here to Tulsipore."

"No more. But how did you make sure of your communication reaching Tulsipore?"

"The Thakur Tukht Singh guaranteed that. He sent it by special messenger."

The Nuwâb sank back against his cushions.

"You would desire to leave early in the evening? As soon as it is cool?"

"Yes, and I would desire to pass the time until then with my friends."

"You cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because they are lodged within the precincts of my zenana."

My heart gave a leap; I felt a sudden choking sensation. But I maintained the watchful self-possession I had assumed the moment I had put foot within the fortress.

"But they could come and see me in the apartment with which I should desire to be furnished for the next few hours."

"To be sure. And you would refresh yourself. You have ridden during the hottest part of the day."

"In order to start from here early in the evening."

"So. It is not usual for a guest to command accommodation, and refreshment, and means of carriage. But all are at your service. Call Munsoor Khan," he says to the major-domo.

Who is this? What is this? By the parted hair, the beardless face, the set of the nether garments, it should be a woman; by the stature, the open stride, the broad, flat chest, a man. One unaccustomed to Eastern life would have felt the disturbance due to any confusion of sex; so did I when first I saw one of the class from whom are chosen the guardians of the harem.

"Munsoor Khan, conduct this gentleman to an apartment in the godown square and provide there for his comfort and his safety. See that there is no intrusion on him. Go with him, sir."

"But about my interview with the two ladies."

This would be the individual to whom orders would be given with regard to the movements of any inmates of the zenana. On his flat man-woman, woman-man face comes a look of curiosity and surprise. He glances from me to the Nuwâb, from the Nuwâb to me.

"This gentleman is a friend of the two ladies," says the Nuwâb. The eunuch looks at me with his blinking, beady eyes. "He has come to take them away with him."

He looks at the Nuwâb.

"And desires an interview with them. Come back to me about that. Conduct the gentleman. But what is your name, sir?"

"Hayman."

"And who are you? Of what occupation?"

"An officer in the army."

"And how got you to Oonchagaon?"

"From Afzalnagar."

"Provide for the gentleman's safe-guarding and privacy; thou understandest?"

"Well," said the eunuch in the shrill voice of his class.

"Follow him, sir—captain or lieutenant?"

"Lieutenant."

CHAPTER XXII

THE NUWÂB'S HOSPITALITY

WE return as I had come until we reach the outermost inclosure. Then we move along under the partition wall, the eunuch giving some orders by the way, until we arrive at an opening in the wall closed by a heavily padlocked gate. My conductor unlocks the side wicket, and passing through it we enter a yard round which are rows of buildings two stories high. Those on the ground floor seemed chiefly store-rooms, to judge by the many closed and padlocked doors. Some of them are built wide and open, without doors, like coach-houses, and in them I see put away tents, gaily painted palanquins, litters, rich elephant housings. I remember that the Nuwâb had called this the godown, or store-room, square. We arrive at a door closed by a chain at the top, letting which drop the eunuch conducts me up a staircase into a verandah overlooking the yard. This has a row of chambers behind it. He conducts me into the outer of the two rooms leading one into the other at the end of it.

"These for you," he squeaks.

"For an hour or two. Why, the inner room leads into the open air."

"Very much so," he squeaks.

Passing through it I find myself facing the open sky, hanging in the air, looking down from a giddy height on the river below, over a vast champagne beyond: it opened out on to a small balcony.

In the inner room is a bedstead, in the outer one a small, square, wooden daïs. Two servants have come with food, water-jars, a sheet and pillow. These disposed on daïs and bedstead they and the eunuch depart.

"Eat and drink and sleep, sir," says the latter at the door, and he smiles with his broad square teeth, and his little, cartilaginous nose, and his beady eyes.

I hear the chain of the door at the foot of the staircase put up, the wicket in the gate closed. Why this exact restoration? What harm in my having access to the store-rooms below? I was not likely to damage or steal. It might be necessary for my safety, at this time of fanatical fury, to close the wicket. Why close the door at the foot of the staircase? But it had been a very hot ride. I hasten to relieve myself of the voluminous, encircling cummerbund; put down the sword and pistol; lave my blistered face; drink deep draughts of water; eat some of the food. But I soon resume my weapons, gird up my loins again. I had an eager yet fearful longing for the coming interview. I had seen them last under such different, such joyous circumstances: the remaining members of the happy family circle of which I had formed a part at the joyous Christmastide but six months before: the wife and sister and child of my dearest friend, my dear friend, dead in his prime. What their astonishment and delight, even though with the reawakening of a great sorrow, at seeing me—me, come to deliver them! I hurry into the verandah and stand there with my eyes fixed on the gate. I stand so for a long time. My eyes are fixed upon the gate, my ears strain to hear the creak of the opening of the wicket. It opens. I see once more the faces so dear to me. It opens not. The profound silence holds. But I can bear the suffocating feeling of the heat, the stillness, the expectancy no longer. I hurry through my rooms into the balcony. Then I hurry back again and retake my stand.

The shadows in the courtyard deepen. The chirruping of birds sounds again. I begin to be mad with impatience. I steady myself. There might be many reasons for the delay in their coming—it might be necessary to safeguard their movements. A sudden complete shade in the yard; the sun has sunk below the level of some high adjacent building. If there is any difficulty and danger in moving them about, perhaps the Nuwâb has determined that they shall join me only just before the time of departure. I gaze longingly at the gate. The shadow in the courtyard deepens. I hurry out into the

balcony, not merely for the sense of freshness which, at least, I get there, but to judge how near it is to the end of the heat and brightness in which we may not travel, to the beginning of the coolness and darkness in which we may. The sun is very near the horizon. I hurry back. It is cooler now in the courtyard, but the gate stands shut. What an agony of suspense! what a fierce, corroding expectancy! what hope! what fear! I walk up and down the verandah. Once more to the balcony. The sun has set; the bright veil of the sunshine lifted; the vast champagne stands out clear. I hear the cawing of the homeward-flying crows. The darkness is at hand.

It has fallen in the courtyard. The creak of the wicket opening. I strain my eyes. This time it has opened. Munsoor Khan and a servant. The latter comes up. He puts a lamp in my outer room, lights it, goes down again. I am waiting for Munsoor Khan to come up. The chain of the door at the foot of the staircase put up; the wicket closed; the courtyard vacant.

I stagger; I reel; I clutch at the railing. I look around me. The twinkling of the little flame of the lamp proclaims that for us there is no departure to-night, as surely as the great orb of the rising sun proclaims the coming day. A horror of great darkness falls upon me. My soul sinks within me. I am cast down into the depths. What does this that has happened to me portend? The protecting power of our name is gone. What does this import to me? That does not matter. What does it import to them—women—to her, young and beautiful? There comes over me, helpless, the blackness of despair. My God! Yes, my God! To Him I turn for help—mutely—my brain is stricken. Then rise up remembered words of litany and psalm—succour, help, and comfort, all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation—show thy pity upon all prisoners and captives. Help them, the innocent and weak, and let them not be cast down into hell. To me give strength. It comes with the petition. I rise up to meet the situation. I see now that the Nuwâb had never meant to grant my request, would have said so in other fashion, openly, directly with scorn and contumely, or tiger-like softness, but that I was so fully armed: had the pistol.

I am now a prisoner. I proceed to examine my place of custody. I look into the other rooms along the verandah, some of those whose doors are open; they do not affect my situation. I pass through my own two end rooms into the balcony. A sheer drop of wall below it, and then of cliff to the river. No means of escape that way; if there had been I should not have been put here. Not far from the balcony is the round of a room on the top of a circular bastion; not far, only about twenty yards or so, but between the sheer, smooth surface of the wall; no ledge, or string-course, or line of cornice between. That nearness makes it the most prominent object in my view, but otherwise, with the yawning gulf between, it, too, has no bearing on my position; presents no mode of escape. And all this I might have anticipated; of course there would be but one mode of ingress and egress for the store-house courtyard—that at the gate. But I had thought that there might be some means of escape which would ordinarily be deemed impossible, but which might be possible to one who had made the ascents and descents I had amid the upper heights of the Himalaya.

The gate of the yard opened into the large outer inclosure; across that was the outer gate. When the man brought up the lamp I could have cut him down, rushed down the steps, and cut down the eunuch, got out of the yard, dashed across the inclosure and through the outer gate, and made a run for it, the darkness helping; I was strong of arm, swift of foot, with a good sword in my grasp.

But it was not for my own sake, but theirs, that I had wished to get out. It was because of the feeling of helplessness, of inability to help them locked in here, that I had looked about for some means of exit, however perilous. But could I be of any service to them without? I could only convey to Tulsipore, if I could get there, the information of their being here, and that I had conveyed already. No; for them I were better lodged within the fortress. And I might be able to find some means of helping them—of communicating with them. My servant must have arrived; I might do so through him, but only if he were allowed admittance here, and he might not be. The eunuch, Munsoor Khan, was in charge of me. He was the only person I was sure of seeing. Could I influence him?

Having an abhorrence of the men of his class I had not looked at him carefully or closely and obtained such information as to his character as his face could afford. He was pompous, by virtue of his office—as Keeper of the Harem—a post of dignity and importance. That was manner. Had he any ruling quality? History, both sacred and profane, has told us a great deal about these men—how they played a prominent part not only in private, but in public affairs, held high offices in the households of princes and kings, commanded armies, ruled provinces. The force of the passion of which they were debarred seems to pass into the other passions, good or bad—probity, courage, benevolence, malevolence, vanity, covetousness—and makes them display themselves with more than ordinary force. It is too often the baser qualities—malice, lewdness, greed, deceit—that exhibit themselves in shameless intensity; but often also the higher ones—energy, fidelity, prudence, benevolence—that have made noble display. With this man it was neither the highest nor the lowest; he had not the low, degraded look, the horrible, satyr-like leer, nor a calm, superior look; these I should have marked. I can remember only that he had round, bird-like eyes, a jackdaw-like sort of look. I must wait until to-morrow. He will come in the morning, as he came this evening.

I go out into the balcony to refresh myself with the coolness. Hanging over the railing with the vast void beneath I experience a sudden sense of physical smallness, of helplessness. But the mind of man is great. I look up at the bright sky above and am strengthened. Man has power. God gives him power.

There is an object near at hand to attract my attention. In the round of the room above the bastion facing my balcony was a small window filled in with a pierced marble panel. With the light now shining behind it, and the darkness without, the minute exquisite interlacing of its tracery stood out clear. So near, and yet so separate! What was the life going on behind it in there? What tragedies may have been enacted in there! There need not—no more than the ordinary tragedies of birth and death.

But that must be the first of the line of buildings of the zenana. My heart gives a leap. *They* may be in there. My

eyes fix on the glittering square. Then I turn them away from it. That way madness lies.

My thoughts must be with her, but let it be in the past and not in the present. I can recall every moment of that past, a recent past and of no long continuance, one of brief, momentous weeks. That happy Christmas-time. Her declared interest in me as her brother's greatest friend; her beauty, her brightness, her gaiety, her pretty Irish ways; her thoughtfulness, too, her simple earnest piety; her charms of mind and person; the awakening of the mighty passion, its hopes, its fears, the longings, the despairs; my departure without daring to put my fate to the proof. I recall my talks with Alexander about the dear, common Addiscombe days. In those two sentences I sum up my thoughts of many hours.

Then came a sudden and overpowering sleepiness. I pull forward the light bedstead and place it across the doorway leading into the balcony so as to get the benefit of the cool outer air. I had laid my sword and pistol on it, and having now disposed these so as to be near at hand, I am about to throw myself down on the charpoy when it occurs to me that it would not be wise to leave the door leading into the rooms wide open, as it was now, even though it promoted a draught. I go to close it. It had once been provided with a chain and hasp to close it from within, but now the chain is gone. I do not like the thought of going to sleep with it open, so that anyone could creep in noiselessly, overpower me, seize my weapons, render me helpless. I put the door to, and then move the small but heavy wooden daïs up against it. It cannot be opened now without a good deal of force, without noise. As I swing my coat away I feel in it the weight of the gold coins, the gold bracelet. Here is a means of influence: hoarded power; I think that vaguely, for now upon me is that overpowering desire of sleep which makes a man oblivious of all else, even of its twin sister death, so that he will lie down in the killing snow, in the midst of wild beasts, in the boat drifting on to the breakers. I place my face toward the outer doorway; for a moment the glimmering chequer-work of the window attracts me, and then I am asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SECRET GALLERY

MY opening eyes rest upon the stone lace-work of the window. I rise and step out into the balcony. The sun is not yet up, but this is the clearest time of the day, his actual presence is more obliterating than illuminating, more especially during the midday hours when the too great glory possesses the land, when stretches the undistinguishable waste of the day: now most clearly visible is the wide champagne below with its dark-massed groves and tree-embowered villages, its only limit the grand, unbroken curve of the horizon; while immediately beneath winds the channel of the river. The birds begin to stir in the bushes under the castle wall. From beyond the river comes up the faint lowing of the herds, the cawing of the crows moving off from their roosting to their feeding places. From the river itself ascends the chant of some early-moving boatmen: "With a pull, and a tug, and a haul, heigho! Up against the stream we go!" They are towing a boat up the river. They at their ordinary work, and I in this terrible situation! I go in. I wash and dress. I eat and drink. Then I light one of the cigars Mr. Le Roi had given me—his doing so a great mark of friendship at such a time as this—and walk up and down the verandah smoking. The light quickens in the courtyard. A cat creeps across it. I feel in the outer pocket of my blouse for the gold coins I had put into it from the inner pocket. They say that greed is one of the most usual distinguishing qualities of these eunuchs.

The wicket opens. Munsoor Khan enters followed by a couple of men. The latter come upstairs. They bring a fresh supply of food and water. They are going down again.

"Tell the eunuch that I wish to speak to him; it is necessary for him to come up."

I hear him coming up the stairs; I retire into my front room, then into the inner one.

"Why, where art thou?" he calls out.

"Here."

"There! Why not here? Am I to run after thee?"

"I have given you the trouble to come in here as I desired to speak to you in private. Why did not your master carry out his engagements with me yesterday? Why not?"

"My master himself alone knows."

"Then I must demand it of himself. I must see him. You must conduct me to his presence, and at once."

"No one is conducted into the presence of the Nuwâb Sahib, the Beneficent, without prior permission."

"Then go to him and obtain that permission. Say that I must see him at once. It will be better for himself. I am an English officer, the authorities at Tulsipore are aware that I and my two friends are here. He led me to understand, yesterday, that I should see my friends and that we should depart in the evening, neither of which things was done."

"It would not be well with the man who conveyed to the Fountain of Goodness a message such as that."

"If there is any likelihood of any little trouble in the matter I could not, of course, expect you to undertake it for nothing," I say, as I hold out my hand on the palm of which lie two of the bright gold pieces. And now one at least of the dominant passions stands out clear, as clear as had the pattern of the pierced panel when the lamp was lighted behind it—greed.

He looks down on the gold pieces with all his eyes. He pecks them off my palm, he hides them away, jackdaw-like.

"Gold! Have you more of these?"

"I have this," I said, holding up the solid gold bracelet which the lad Churrun Singh had given me, "and it is yours if you procure me the interview with the Nuwâb."

His eyes gleam. But he shakes his head and says—

"I cannot carry the message. It would be most dangerous; perhaps for myself; most certainly for you. Just now his mind is in a poise about you: if he does not help you he does

not hurt you; the message might disturb the balance and lead to your destruction; throw him into a sudden fury."

I continue to hold up the massive round of gold.

"But there is something else I could do."

"What?"

He looks cautiously towards the door, lowers his squeaky voice.

"Take you to them."

"To them? Whom?"

"The ladies—your friends."

"Take me to them? They are within the precincts of the zenana."

"I can pass people into it and out of it." He wagged his head; he smiled a horrid smile; looked at me knowingly.

"Now?"

"Not in the daytime—to-night—give it to me."

"After I have seen them. At what hour?"

"I know not. But I must be going. The men below will be wondering. It is a house of suspicion. Go not to sleep too soon. I will come."

He hurries away.

The day passes—somehow—in conflicting hopes and fears, in eager expectation, in deep despondency. The midday, the afternoon, the evening, the inrush of the dark. The creaking of the wicket. A man comes up with fresh food and water, lights the little oil-lamp, disappears. The wicket shuts. Will it open again to-night? He will not come early in the night. The heat within is terrible. The buildings are giving off the accumulated heat of the day. I go out into the balcony to breathe in the fresher air up from the river. I should hear the opening of the wicket, the dropping of the chain of the door at the foot of the staircase, from here. But I cannot remain here, away from the courtyard; I go back to the verandah overlooking it, remain there, walking up and down fiercely along its whole length, or leaning, immovable, over the railing, listening, with strained and fixed attention, for the creak of the wicket, as I had listened in jungles for the rustle of the leaves, the breaking of a twig. My whole being is absorbed in the listening. Is it owing to this that I hear the chain of the door at the foot of the staircase let down without having heard the

wicket open? Have I been so absorbed in trying to hear as not to hear? I step back to the door of my outer room, in which the lamp is burning, so as to be able to see the face of the man coming up the staircase before he reaches the landing. It is Munsoor Khan. A thrill of excitement passes through me.

"Follow me." He descends. I follow him.

When I have passed through the door at the foot of the staircase he closes it and puts up the chain. As we move forward after that we collide. I am stepping in the direction of the gate, he the other way.

"Why, how is this?"

"Hush. After me."

He makes for the side of the courtyard facing the gate. He pushes open a door.

"Two steps forward."

I make them. I am in solid darkness. The door is shut behind me. It was one of the moments of fear of my life. Then a sudden bright illumination. He has drawn the slide of a dark lantern. We are in one of the store-rooms. Chests and boxes about the floor, cupboards against the wall. Munsoor Khan locks the entrance door. I lay my hand on the butt of my pistol. He moves across the room and opens the door of one of the cupboards. What does he want out of it? No cupboard. There is given to view the mouth of a tunnel or gallery. He passes on into it, I follow; he locks the false cupboard door behind us. The light flashes brightly on ahead of us, for the roof and sides of the tunnel are coated with the famed Indian cement that presents a marble-like surface. The tunnel is about ten feet wide and seven feet high; the arched roof has a very slight curvature; the floor is covered with sand; it first ascends, then runs level. At regular intervals along the wall on the left-hand side are narrow slits which let in a refreshing breath of air; it must come up from the river; at two points in the opposite wall we pass by iron gratings behind which show small cells. These must be some of the underground dungeons of which they had spoken.

Now the forward glancing rays display a strong iron hook hanging from the centre of the curve of the roof; now we have reached it; now with a startling suddenness my footsteps

no longer fall silent on the sand, but resound on planking; instead of the solid floor I have beneath me a swaying platform; there is an upward rush of chill dank air. The eunuch has stopped and turned. I step hastily off the platform. He points his finger upward to the hook, then downward to the platform. I nod my head. I understand. People were hung from the hook, then cut down, and their bodies allowed to drop into the shaft beneath.* He looks behind him. I put my hand on my pistol.

"Sahib! Would you give me five thousand rupees if I got you and your friends safely out of this place?" he says.

"Yes," I answer vehemently.

He turns and walks on. We come to a closed door. Munsoor Khan unlocks it, locks it again when we have passed through. We are in a large irregular-shaped apartment, with a good deal of furniture in it, with many doors. "Remain here," says Munsoor Khan, as he goes out through one. I look around me. Four doors exactly the same. Which is the one leading into the gallery? I cannot tell. They are all exactly alike. He passed out of that one, but which of the other three? He has returned and beckoned to me. We move along a short length of corridor. We enter a small ante-room. "Half an hour," he says, and with a low announcing "Ahem!" he is gone.

* The reader who has visited the great fortress of Agra will remember that among the private apartments there is a secret gallery with an arrangement such as this, and once used for the same purpose, secret execution, secret destruction.—J. H.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BETROTHAL

THE curtain at the other end of the room is lifted and Maud Alexander hurries through.

Is this she around whom there had been an atmosphere of such deep content, with face so haggard and worn and fearful?

"Oh, Mr. Hayman! Mr. Hayman!" she cries, as she rushes forward and seizes my hand. "Your servant told us that you were dead—you too. And we grieved so. All gone, all, we said. And when he returned to-day——"

"He has returned?"

"Yes; he told us that you were alive—that he had seen you—that you were here. Oh, we thanked God—Mary and I—we thanked God. Oh, that it should be your servant who came to wait upon us here, that it should be you to whom he gave our paper!"

"Not so strange when you consider that we have both wandered into the part of the country in which he has his home."

"But Denis is dead, Mr. Hayman: my Denis is dead; your friend Denis is dead. They shot him. I saw him lying there dead in the road. I wished to remain with him, but they forced me away. They said I must come with Philip. We left him—lying there dead in the road. Oh, my God, can I ever forget it!" and she clasped her hands over her eyes and broke into a passion of weeping. I let her weep for a while: indeed, I could not speak for a while. Then I say, "My dearest friend—so noble a fellow——"

"Yes—yes——"

"So good and kind."

"Yes—yes."

"He was to me as a brother."

"And what was he to me, Mr. Hayman! Oh, what was he to me! Oh, my God! my God!" and she trembled and shook, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"There! there!"

"Oh, my God!" she shrieked out, as if in a sudden agony.

"You must forget for the moment. You must think only of the present, of your situation here."

"Think of it! Have I not thought of it? Oh, my God, the horror of it! The terror I have been in lest they should separate us—oh——"

"Hush! Stop! You must compose yourself. For your own sake—for the sake of us all."

"But now that you have come to take us away—thank God for His mercy! When do we leave?"

"That I cannot tell. Is my man with you now?"

"He waits on us only during the daytime."

"Will you tell him when he comes to-morrow—this—morning that I am in confinement in the godown square?"

"In confinement! In confinement! You in confinement! Oh, I thought you had come to take us away from this terrible place at once. Have I not thanked God for it?"

"I have every hope of being able to do so. I have found a way. But they keep the gate of the courtyard in which I am lodged locked."

"Then how have you come here now?"

"By a secret way. Through the instrumentality of the man who came to you just now."

"He has charge of us."

"Miss Alexander," I say.

"Mary; she is well, wonderfully well, considering all that she has gone through—that sight—the loss of her brother—you know how fond they were of one another—my Denis! oh, my Denis! That terrible journey—and the terrible time here—such dreads—such fears. Oh, you do not know what she has been to me, Mr. Hayman—I have been so miserable, so broken-hearted, so helpless, so—so—so apprehensive. She has been my help, my stay, my support, my comforter. So brave, so thoughtful, so unselfish, so uncomplaining. She is sitting now with Philip."

"Is he not well?"

"No. It was a terrible shock to him, the death of his father. You know how fond they were of one another. Oh, my poor Denis! You know how proud his father was of him —and all the plans we made about him—and now—now——"

"You must bear up for his sake."

"Now he is fatherless."

"My time with you is very limited. Miss Alexander——"

"You would like to see her. She would like to see you. I will go and sit with Philip."

"Good-bye. I shall not be able to remain here much longer. Bear up. In God our trust."

I stand expectant of her. She is coming, my beloved; coming at an hour such as this. When I had seen her last it was at a time so happy, so secure, so excellent. She comes. She is here. Our hands clasp close. Our eyes meet in a long, close gaze. Her eyes fill with tears—she is thinking of him with whom I had been linked so closely, to whom I had been the friend that sticketh closer than a brother—but bravely she keeps them back. I scan her face. Not on it now the bright, girlish brilliance. But on it now a nobler womanhood. Not on it, now, the brightness of happiness and a full content; of gay high spirits; not the radiance as of stars and constellations raining influence, diffusing joy, filling the soul with delight, with intoxication; but a high, noble, steadfast look, as of one who had seen grave things, been nearer to the great Protector. They were both beautiful—sad dower for this hour—but the beauty of Maud Alexander was under eclipse, hers shone forth more effulgent. Danger and hardship may diminish, but they may, also, exalt beauty. Gems acquire brilliancy by tribulation. And so were augmented what I had thought could not be enhanced, her beauty, my love.

"We were told you were dead."

"You were sorry?"

"My brother's dearest friend. Oh, how strange that it should be you, Mr. Hayman, whom my paper reached—you who have come to us."

"I was moving in your direction. We were moving toward one another."

"Oh, what happiness to see you again when we thought you dead. Your servant thought so. How strange! How wonderful! It was such an additional grief to her—to my sister-in-law—to me," she added softly.

Our eyes met.

"I came here yesterday——"

"Your man has told us. How you started off at once, in the heat of the day, left your place of security to come to this terrible place, this place of danger."

"Could I do otherwise when I heard that his wife and child —you, his sister, were here?"

"We cost my poor brother his life. He could have escaped but for us. And now you——"

"I must speak to you about our situation. I saw the Nuwâb yesterday, and he told me that we should leave in the evening, that he would provide the means of carriage, that I should see you all before we left in the apartment to which he told the man who has brought me here to-night—Munsoor Khan they call him——"

"He has charge of the harem"—her face paled at the word —"and so of us."

"Told him to conduct me. But he spoke falsely——"

"He is a terrible man." She shuddered. "Your servant has told Maud all about him."

"You never came. I found myself behind bolts and bars, doubly bolted in. I thought at first it might be done for my security, lest some of his fanatical followers might make their way in and kill me. But it was to secure me in another way. I am a close prisoner."

"A close prisoner!"

"Yes; but not helpless. You see, I am well armed. And I have gold. I bribed this man to bring me here. He has offered to effect our escape for a certain sum. He has the power. He made the offer only just now, as we were coming here; I shall arrange with him when I leave you. I do not know what means of escape he will propose. But keep ready for a start. Be of good cheer. It looks most hopeful. Keep up heart."

Sound of footsteps in the corridor. I look at her. She is

within my arms. Our lips meet. Our souls meet. It is our betrothal.

We are back in the irregular-shaped apartment. I turn to the eunuch. "Five thousand rupees the day you and I and my friends reach Tulsipore, as you asked; another thousand if we leave to-night."

"In your room," he says, and opens the door leading into the gallery or traverse.

As I pass under the hook, over the platform, I think of those men and women who had swung from that hook, whose dead bodies had been cut down and dropped down the well, or who setting foot on the treacherously set trap-door, had dropped living down the shaft, to be killed at once or die a miserable, lingering death.

"*Shukr Allah!* (Thank God!)" said Munsoor Khan fervently, as we reached the door of my room. "*Shukr Allah!*" said he more fervently when we had got in.

"Thanksgiving to God always; but was it not due when we had entered the apartment at the far mouth of the tunnel? After that closed doors and the key in your hand."

"We might have found someone there to swing us from the hook, drop us down the well, thrust us behind the grating of one of the cells. There is another key, with the Nuwâb. You know him not. He divines things. It would have amused him to have caught us there."

"About my proposal——"

"It cannot be managed to-night."

"Why not? You bring my friends to this square; we get to the outer gate, you pass us through—you can do that? It is the one point of difficulty."

"I am in the habit of passing people in and out unquestioned. But after that? How far off should we have got in the next two or three hours before the household is astir? What would the pursuit be like when the Nuwâb knew? His swiftest horsemen after us."

"But could you not provide some means of carriage for us? A vehicle with a swift horse?"

"Sir, how provide you with a vehicle from within or without without the knowledge of the Nuwâb? Sir, it would be difficult to creep out on our naked feet without his knowing it. Sir, it

makes me fearful even to entertain this intention, lest it should arouse his suspicion. He divines your very intention—I know not how. By the power of Satan." He looked around him fearfully. "Sir, it is because of that continued fearfulness that I have determined to leave the house—to face this one fearfulness. Sir, it is not on foot, nor in any vehicle, that we can make our escape."

"Then how?"

"By the river—in a boat. That will bear us away from the fortress swiftly. On the water we are out of the reach of the horsemen. They will have to send a boat after us. We can fight them on the water, not on the land. I have firearms, you have yours. Thirty miles down the river is the fortress of a great Hindoo zemindar. If we get there we are safe. If——"

"Most excellent!" I cry in exultation. "But let us start at once—now—to-night. Another thousand rupees if we do so. You do not doubt my promise?"

"Sir, the promise to pay of you English is sure—that is why you have had power in the land. It was because I knew that I might place full trust in your promise that I thought of undertaking this business. For by engaging in it I lose my employment here. I have to leave this place for good. I should need the whole of to-morrow to make certain arrangements concerning myself. I have to arrange for the boat and the boatmen, to have the boat at a certain secret landing-place, to which we can get down through a short path through the woods. There must be the very smallest amount of delay possible between our leaving of the fort and our getting off by the boat."

"Then we cannot make the attempt to-night," I say, sorrowfully.

"No, sir; because it must not be an attempt, but a certainty."

"It would not be well for us to fail."

"I do not know what it might be for you, sir; but I know what it would be for me. I, Munsoor Khan, engaged in an attempt to let loose his prisoners, to deliver this beautiful young woman out of his hands! It would not mean death to me; oh no! I should be kept as a warning to others, as was another. I should have my feet cut off, because I had meant

to run away, and my right hand cut off, so that I could eat only with the hand of shame, and my eyes put out, as was the case with him."

"Is it certain for to-morrow night?"

"Certain, because I myself desire to go. Mine is not a bad post here; many little pickings. But now there is too much continued fearfulness."

"The Nuwâb grows more harsh?"

"Yes—ruthless—untrusting. But more than that. The son has grown up. There are now two tigers in the house. About this very young woman, your friend, what fierce contention! The father desires her, the son desires her. That has been her salvation. I am between two fires, two pits, between the upper and the nether millstone. I like not such fearfulness. There is no peace with it. Better one great fear than continual apprehension."

"Truly."

"And so the thought occurs to me that by enabling you and your friends to escape from here I may obtain a sum of money that will make up for the loss of my employment, enable me to get away to some other province, far from here, and there eat my bread in peace and quiet. I grow old. I will make all the arrangements, and let you know to-morrow what time we start. And now for the bracelet, sir."

I give it him. He is gone.

CHAPTER XXV

MIDNIGHT THE HOUR

THE next morning I was in an ecstasy. My heart was singing a merry tune. I was raised above the earth. I sailed the empyrean. My gay thoughts sobered when I thought of the possible failure of our enterprise, but soon winged their upward flight again. And whatever might be, that had been, was. She had been within my arms ; our eyes had told our love ; our lips had met. She was mine, mine, mine ; for ever mine. Our souls had mingled. We now stood one to all eternity. She was mine, and I was hers. Linked by love taken and given, we were now one for ever. In the communion of that unspoken betrothal, that rite of faith most sweet and sacred, around us now the bond that separated us from all the world, from all creation, within which was everlasting companionship and content. Friend of all friends, choicest of all companions, nearest of all relations, now, henceforth, and for ever. Her hands, her eyes, her lips had pledged her troth to me, acknowledged that oneness, made it of material adamantine, everlasting, divine. I stood on the balcony and looked out on the wide world with a great joy. With a great joy I watched it brightening. I was lifted above the earth. For this was not to me a matter merely of human passion, however high and noble, of human sentiment, however deep and true. It had for me a divine significance. It was to me a consecration, a sacrament, a thing not of time, but of eternity.

The midday meal is brought ; the men have put it down and gone out of the door ; Munsoor Khan, waiting for that, has uttered one word ere he follows : " Midnight."

Hallelujah !

The meal is to me a feast.

Then comes the lingering, leaden-footed afternoon. Not in India, as in England, do you desire the sunshiny summer hours to linger, but rather to hasten away. But to-day my new-found blitheness and steadfastness of heart enables me not to mind that weary slowness, though it means a delay in the coming of the blessed hour of our escape, though I am occupationless, with nothing to do but sit or stand or walk. My mind is busy; full of fancies, bright and rosy, full of thoughts. Under the management of one in the position of Munsoor Khan, with command of passage all through the fortress, free to pass all guards, at all hours, ordinarily unquestioned; secret movement at strange hours and in strange company known to all as a part of his duties, our escape seems sure. From here to the outer gate not far. From the outer gate to the river not far. I go out into the balcony and drop my gaze down on the winding stream. Once in the boat—I lay my hand on the butt of my pistol, the hilt of my sword—they may take us if they can.

We must escape. This insane rising up against us must soon be put down. Soon will come back the old condition of things. I build gorgeous palaces in the future. How glorious will be our common life here on earth! I have deeper thoughts of the eternal union.

The past and the future relieve me of the heavy, intervening, needless present. And whether I think of the past or the future it is in connection with her. I had held her in my arms, our lips had met. The influence of that sacred moment was full upon me. The further back common past was but of short duration. But I remembered every minute of it. I remembered the moment I had first seen her, a vision of delight. The rides through the cold, clear, morning air, she on the back of my glorious Azim, my Arab horse, fit scion of his noble race, on whose back I should have placed no one else but her: how well she sat him, how well she looked! The joyous day of the Indian winter, with its calm, clear sunshine, the dark shadows under the trees, where in the fierce light of the other months was but a dim shade—days "so calm, so clear, so bright," each one "the bridal of the earth and sky." The days we had mostly to ourselves, for Denis was

busy with his official duties, Maud Alexander with her household work. We passed them by ourselves in the drawing-room full of quiet and the breath of flowers, and talked of books and home and the land about us. Or we sat beneath one of the splendid trees about the house—tamarind, or mango, or banian; in the midst of the grounds so full of life, in the air, upon the ground; the parrots darting by in chattering flight, the jay on painted wings, the gentle flight and soft delicious cooing of the doves of many sorts; the curly-tailed squirrels darting about. And I told her about my shooting adventures, and she loved to hear, for she came of a race that hunted and shot. I told her about the trees and their deep connection with the lives of the people, a connection which once held good among ourselves, my own communion with them has ever been close; told her as we sat beneath the great peepul tree, demon-haunted, its huge bole girt round with many a votive thread, for its roots went down into the souls of the people as into the soil. And there it was, I remember—I remember every incident as the wax retains every detail of the seal—watching her running about with the boy Philip; how graceful every movement, motion idealised! And it was under the tamarind that Philip said suddenly—we two sitting silent, silent from close proximity—"Don't you love aunty, Uncle John?" (He called me Uncle John.)

Then my thoughts go forward. Where are we to go to from the fortress of the great Hindu zemindar which is to be our haven? Shall we get escort and carriage from him and make for Tulsipore? Or shall we get another boat there, and an escort, and voyage down the river to the point where it joins the Ganges, where there is a large English station? We must determine there.

Then those cold-weather nights when we enjoyed the unwonted luxury of a fire, and closing round it passed the evening in laughter and merriment or in quiet talk, I incorporate in the family group. Or she would sing some sad Irish melody with an exquisite sensibility and pathos, or a comic song with a delightful arch gaiety: and Denis trolled forth some man's song that had in it the gallop of a horse, the bay of the hound: some sea song that had in it the heave and dash of the ocean. And we talked of our far-away homes.

Oh, nights so joyous and divine! And now poor Denis is dead. I recall how we had sat up to see the old year out, and wished one another a Happy New Year, and expected it.

Her mode of salutation, the sweet, pretty winning mode of greeting of the Irish lady. The fascinating Irish gaiety and humour, with the underlying seriousness and melancholy. The warm home affections and the quick sympathy. The pretty disdain. The poise of the head, the glance of the eyes.

As in our morning rides we had passed by some hideous idol, some uncouth worshipped stone, it had moved her sorrow and indignation, and led to much talk about religion; we were at one in our zeal and strong desire for the introduction into the land of a higher, purer faith: we were at one in our religion, held the same high ideal faith that needed but little of form or ceremony.

But as the day goes by my thoughts fix most on the immediate future. He will bring them through the secret gallery to this courtyard: then we must cross the outer inclosure. Will there be any trouble there, any trouble at the gate?

I had remarked when I entered the fortress the great gong hanging from its tripod by the side of the gateway, on which the man on watch struck the hours. Its unusual size had attracted my attention. Its vibrations were very mellow. They had formed a pleasant break in the monotony before. To-day they had sounded as joy bells.

One stroke upon it: two: three: then the eight strokes that proclaim the end of the midday watch. The twenty-four hours are divided into watches of four hours each. The hours at the beginning and end of the watches, twelve, four, eight, are struck twice over to mark them, proclaim them. At them is the change of guard. Two watches more to the time of our escape.

The heat and the glare (which have made themselves felt with all my preoccupation, they are so severe) diminish. The afternoon has passed, the evening come. The sun is setting. I go out into the balcony to get a breath of cool air. I look down on the wide landscape spread out below me, hard, clear, distinct, no softening veil of mist upon it because of the evening. I can trace the road by which I had come for

a very long way. In yon direction must lie the *garhi* of Tukht Singh: and somewhere that way the garden-inclosure of the avâtar. I begin to think of it, of Ayesha. When I had been recalling the past in the midst of the heavy-gaited hours that had just gone by, I had seemed actually to hear again, in the midst of the profound silence of the overpowering afternoon, the sweet singing of Mary Alexander, as if she were singing somewhere nigh, so distinct, so clear. And so now, distinct and clear, I seem to hear Ayesha exclaiming, "*Jān Amen! Jān Amen!*" There was a great tension on my nerves.

I go in and set myself to pass the time by washing, by eating and drinking—likewise, it was as well to take in provender.

Eight o'clock: eight slow, solemn strokes, then eight quick rattling ones, as is the way. The last watch of the day of our stay has begun. Four hours more. Nine strokes unrepeated. Three hours. I had sat still and smoked. I rise up now. I go out into the balcony. The pierced window shows its pattern upon the round of the wall of the apartment above the adjoining bastion. Below me the dim void, above the glittering vault of heaven. I stand there. Ten slow strokes. With the increasing length of the strokes an increase in excitement. To-day I have not borne my arms all day. I had put them off when the men had departed. I now wind on the long sash, put the pistol into it, sling on the scimitar, loosen it in its scabbard: go out into the verandah overlooking the courtyard. My excitement grows sharp, at moments almost intolerable. But as the time for movement, action, draws nigh it subsides. And now the hour has come. The twelve slow, full, distinct, separate, long-vibrating strokes, and then the almost undistinguishable rattle and blend of the twelve more sharp, quick-struck, rapid strokes on the gong, the reduplication. The short clangour has died away. Deep silence in the courtyard again. I lean over the railing near the head of the staircase, so as to catch the sound of the footsteps in the yard, of the lowering of the chain of the door at the foot of the staircase. Of course they need not arrive exactly on the stroke of the hour. I listen and listen, but there is no sound. How dread the silence!

One deep, solemn, single stroke. Two single strokes. Three single strokes. They will not come now. If they had been coming they would have come before this. Four slow strokes, and their sharp repetition. It is over. Four o'clock, the well-known hour of gunfire at our military stations, the end of the night, the beginning of the day, the hour of awakening and movement.

There sweeps over me a wave of disappointment, and fear—has anything happened to them? It overwhelms me. I give myself up to despair. But such abandonment to despair has to be combated by the forces of religion and manhood, as incompatible with each. Why die before death? A man must keep his energies at command, preserve the thinking brain, the seeing eye, the striking hand. God governs.

I make my arrangements as on the night before and lie down to get an hour or two of sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

FOE AND FRIEND

TWO hours do I sleep, and I awaken much refreshed. I set myself to taking a hopeful view of the matter. There is as much reason to take that as the opposite. The enterprise was not one to be entered upon without perfect assurance of success, Munsoor Khan had said. He had said that as he would be leaving for good himself he would have many arrangements of his own to make. He would have to dispose somehow of his belongings. He would have to arrange for boatmen, a boat; the place from which it was to start. It might make a difference what man was on guard at the gate. He might have been able to get a boat and boatmen only for to-night. For that and other reasons—his great fearfulness of failure, "It must not be an attempt but a certainty," he had said—he may have deferred our departure to to-night. I shall know when Munsoor Khan comes. I cannot know until he comes. Until then as well hope as despair.

I hear the wicket open. Two servants enter. I have remained sitting in my room. They perform their duties, are about to descend.

"Has the eunuch not come?" I ask.

"Oh yes; he is below; in the verandah."

"I suppose he means to come up when I am alone," I think to myself.

But in my impatience I say to them—

"Say that I am waiting for him: I mean, that I desire to see him."

I hear the ascending footsteps. I stand up. What has disturbed the former arrangements, for he must have made them, he had fixed an hour? What is the new one?

A form in the doorway. I step back. This is not the flat face of Munsoor Khan with its little turned-up nose, and beady eyes, and absence of any special expression. A man with a long nose set a little awry; thin lips; close mouth; long, projecting chin. His big green turban and rosary proclaim that he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. On his face a marked expression of fanaticism. Fierce animosity blazes forth upon it as the dark eyes kindling in the deep sockets fall upon me.

"What is it, dog of a Christian?"

"What manner of speech is this?" I say, keeping down the hand with which I had been about to salute him.

"Son of swine! eater of swine!"

"What words are these?" I say, as calmly as I am able.

"The words proper for an infidel, the manner of speech appropriate for a denier of the unity of God."

"Your speech is not becoming; not proper, considering my position and rank. I am an English officer."

"What care I for thy rank, thou who with thy foul tongue say'st that God begets and is begotten! May his curse alight upon thee for the saying, and his forgiveness on me for repeating it! If thou wert to say it at this moment I would slay thee," and he put his hand on the hilt of the sword he wore. "Dog thou, and son of a dog!"

I control myself, keep myself calm. What may his coming in place of Munsoor Khan mean? I thrust that aside. If he has taken Munsoor Khan's place permanently it is only through him that I may be able to work for their deliverance, their safety, their unmolestedness. The change may have been due to circumstances unconnected with us. To the change may Munsoor Khan's not coming be due.

"I have spoken no word against your faith, and I am here in the sacred character of a guest, one to whom is due not only accommodation but respect."

"A guest! Thou a guest! The Nuwâb Ali Karim, the Sword of the Faithful, receive thee, thou Christian, as a guest! A prisoner—and chains should be on thy limbs—and thou shouldst not have food like that," pointing to it, "but dog's meat."

"Regulate your tongue," I say.

"I order my tongue for thee!" he said furiously. "For thee, a vile infidel! A Christian! A Feringhee! One of those who dared assert their sway in this dominion of the faith! dared disturb that dominion! But that is ended, praise be to God, the All-powerful! The Head of the Faithful once more rules in Delhi, which has run red with the blood of the infidel. What a splendid slaughter there!"

"Slaughter of weak women and helpless children."

"Of the breeders of infidels and of their foul progeny."

"Rule your tongue!" I say, less calmly.

"Rule my tongue for thee! Wine bibber! Pig eater! Opponent of the Faith! Traducer of the Almighty! Who givest him a companion! Thou son of a——"

"Control your lips," I say, interrupting him.

"I control my mouth for thee! I will use it to spit on thee!" And he made as if he would do so. That I could not allow. I drew back, on one side, and in so doing got behind the small daïs, which I had pushed away from in front of the door, and this morning not pushed away so far as usual.

"Avoid that. I am armed," I say.

"What care I for that? Thou hast a sword. I have a sword too. I will slay thee, thou infidel."

All along he had used the derogatory thou, not the honorific you. His face flamed to animosity; his eyes blazed with hatred to a point of madness. He was preparing to attack me. He jerked his scimitar round. The furor of fanaticism, of race hatred, was hot upon him. Those of his unhappy class are most eager to display their prowess—eager to overcome, and conquer, and subdue, and injure those of full manhood, and so repay their scorn and contumely; but he was moved by even fiercer motives now. To fight me was welcome, much desired: if I killed him, it was gain; if he killed me, it was double gain; and he might count on that; he was a large-built, powerful man, taller than I. But I don't think he reflected at all in the matter; he would have rushed upon me as a wild bull or elephant might have done, because of the sudden fury awakened within him.

"You do not seem to have observed this," I said, drawing the pistol from the sash. "It has two barrels." I held it

out. "Both are loaded. You cannot rush on me because of the daïs——"

"Coward to get behind it!" he glared at me, panting with baffled fury. "Dog!"

"I should not mind fighting you with the sword—no, I could not fight an *honourable* fight with *you*——" he understood, and I think the words went nigh to requital in full of all the terms of abuse he had lavished on me.

"I can shoot you dead. Your life is now in my power. And I will not spare it. If you move I will kill you. I can tell them that I had to take it in self-defence; they know your disposition; they will believe it. I will not spare it, I say, unless you agree to conduct myself and the other English people here out of the castle and down to the river, and there have a boat ready to take us away. I can shoot you dead—without fail"—and I point the pistol straight at him; it brought the muzzle within a short distance of his breast—"shoot you dead—and will do so unless you give me your promise, swear to me, on the Holy Koran, that you will arrange to conduct my friends and myself out of the castle down to the river—to-night. Speak—swear to me—on the Holy Koran—or I fire."

"Dog, and the son of a dog! Discharge thy pistol. Dost thou think I would deliver thee out of the power of the Nuwâb for the sake of my life? Rather would I give it to bring thee into it, keep thee in it. And so with them—the female Christian dogs—may the Nuwâb deal hardly with you all."

He had not flinched a hair's-breadth; he stood fiercely erect; he glared straight across at me.

He had not, like Munsoor Khan, the weakness of fear. Had he, like him, the weakness of greed?

I saw that the fear of death would not overcome him. For our destruction, but not for our safety, would he give his life. His words rang fiercely true. They came from the inmost depths. I lowered the pistol.

"The Nuwâb cannot deal hardly with us who are here in the character of his guests; or if this be a state of war, as his prisoners. That would be contrary to the mandates of the Koran. Truly do I remember that it is therein enjoined to

show kindness to the traveller, to the captive. Perhaps you are acquainted with its dictates—have heard them."

"Have read them. I am an Arab. And it sayeth when you encounter the unbelievers strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them; and bind them in bonds."

"That is in the fight. To the captive kindness is enjoined. Besides our presence here is known to the countryside, to my friend Tukht Singh, to the English authorities. It would not be wise to injure us. But we are anxious to be among our own people. Truly no fear of death have you. But he who has to work for his living is but a slave. Freedom and power are to him only who has the means to be above that need. Then has he command over others. Then can he sit at home at ease, or go whither he wishes. To be among our own people —I mean immediately—I would put you in that position. We could pay you a sum of money that would give you an ample income for life."

"Accursed infidel! Foul feeder on pig's flesh! Vile Christian! Intruder into this domain of the Faith! Evil in habit, and foul in thought! Asperser of the sacred Book! Opponent of the Prophet! Enemy of God! I would not take my life from thy hand, and would I take thy gold?"

"Five thousand rupees," I said.

"Not a lakh, not a crore."

"I meant to say six thousand rupees; if the escape be arranged for to-night."

"Not five nor six; not if thou didst pile them up mountain high. No league nor compact can there be between us, but only enmity, for thou art an infidel, and I am a true believer. And how was it that they allowed thee to keep thy weapons? That must be remedied. The Nuwâh Sahib is away to-day, and may not be back until to-morrow evening. But it must be remedied. We cannot permit strangers within the house to carry firearms."

"Why has Munsoor Khan not come to-day?"

"Dog, and son of a dog!" and he turned and strode away.

Here was a new condition of things. I put aside all gloomy and terrible thoughts—and very terrible and gloomy they were —all dread imaginings—thrust them away with both hands.

A new condition of things; I set myself to considering it calmly. The new situation—the change of custodians—might be due simply to some ordinary domestic circumstance. Munsoor Khan might have accompanied the Nuwâb; that would account for his not coming; his not being able to carry out the plan of escape—for everything. The change might be temporary only. Munsoor Khan may resume his place to-morrow—to-morrow evening. Had the plan of escape been somehow discovered—through his movements—through the boatmen, or by the intuition with which Munsoor Khan credited his master the Nuwâb? Had the Nuwâb become aware of his having conducted me to my friends, into the sacred precincts of the zenana, that crime of blackest dye? He was cunning, untrusting, had, no doubt, a perfect system of espionage—that was his occult faculty, his magic, his black art. Had Munsoor Khan swung from the hook, been put into the tiger's cage, into one of the cells in the secret passage? There had not been the faintest sign to show that my transit to and fro had been observed. Munsoor Khan had come to me the next morning as usual. And as for discovery of his arrangements for our departure, he had too vivid anticipation of what that discovery would involve for him to have made them so that they could be discovered. His position allowed of his making such arrangements without awakening suspicion. There was no need, as it was of no benefit, harmful, to add despair to disappointment.

To-morrow would show whether the change of custodians was permanent or temporary. Here was to-day. Here was this fierce fanatic with his malevolence, his hatred. He was not to be won over. Would his enmity take active form? Would he try to have me disarmed? If he comes with half a dozen men with firearms, I must submit or lose my life. I could shoot one of them, but to what benefit? The killing me might mean immediate active ill for them; make the Nuwâb thus committed reckless, open the floodgate of outrage. Would it not be better for me to try to make my escape by a dash out of the courtyard when they come in the evening? But was it not a mere mad thought, to overpower the men here, get across the inclosure, which might be crowded with people at any moment, get through the full

guard at the gate? And what good to them if I did get out? It might precipitate their fate. Away with that!

And so the afternoon went by, not as the preceding one in hopeful dreams and delightful memories, but in anxious thoughts, and, do what I would, in dread imaginings.

But they pass, disappear, when the time for the evening visit arrives. I pass my hand from butt of pistol to hilt of sword. What is about to happen? Who are about to come? A demand for my arms—am I to give them up and become helpless?—an attack upon me? A time of peril—death. Or will it be merely the usual providing of fresh food and water, lighting of the lamp? A thought strikes me. I take a gold piece in my hand.

The creak—crash it seems to me now—of the bolt of the gate, the clang of the dropping of the chain at the foot of the staircase; a servant comes up: no others follow. The laying down of the food and water and the lighting of the lamp, which take no time, and he is about to depart.

"Ahem!"

He looks at me. I hold out my hand with the gold piece shining upon it. He glances behind him.

"Yes?"

"Why has Munsoor Khan not come to-day?"

He extends his fingers. I let him take the gold mohur off my hand.

"I do not know. I know nothing," he says gently, and is gone.

I drink of the fresh, cold water. I stand out in the balcony. I gaze up at the sky strewn thick with stars; there come upon me thoughts of the awful mysteries of fate.

The sound of the gong. How far out on the vast champaign below do the mellow vibrations reach? How far out do they mark the passing hours, day and night? How the midnight notes must go quivering over the sleeping land, out into the infinity of which we form a part and know so little!

The present strokes were ten; I had counted them one by one. I go in to make my arrangements for sleep, as on the nights preceding. Not to-night shall I omit to place the daïs well against the door of the front room. I am about to close that door when I hear a sound below. A fumbling at the

door at the foot of the staircase—a soft fumbling. Do they mean to steal in upon me unawares? Has the new eunuch come himself? I can meet them or him best at the head of the stairs. There I have the advantage of position. I loose my pistol, draw my sword, close the door of my room so that only a little light shines through, then take my stand without it, on the landing. He is stealing up the short staircase. He is now near the top. Extending my foot I kick back the door. The light floods out. It falls on an upturned face. It is the face of my faithful, devoted Bhola Ram.

CHAPTER XXVII

HELP UNEXPECTED

"YOU!" I exclaim. "Have you come from them? How are they? Well? Unhurt? Unmolested?"

"Yes—as they were when you saw them. But I come not from them. From another."

"From another? From whom?"

"The head of the harem."

"From Munsoor Khan? But why does he not come himself? Why is another now in charge of me—one most inimical—who would have slain me?"

"Slain you——"

"Had I not been armed."

"A Christian hater—a fierce man—well named Sher (Tiger) Khan. I asked about the change. They said Munsoor Khan was ill. But it is a house of lies."

"But you come not from him, the head of the harem?"

"No, sir, from another—the female head—she whom they call the Mother of the Harem."

"What does she want with me?"

"To conduct you to a friend."

"To my friends?"

"She said a friend. Perhaps she meant the elder lady, Mrs. Alexander."

"There is no harmful design, no treachery, in this? This Sher Khan said I should not be allowed to remain armed. They may have become aware of my having been to see my friends, having been through the secret passage. How came you now?"

"Through a secret passage."

"It may be designed to set on me there, disarm me, kill me; they could not do so here without loss to themselves, as you in your present position will understand."

"Yes," he says, as he completes his ascent.

Then he goes on—

"Sir, in this house one always thinks of treachery. So I said to her, 'Is any harm meant to him in this?' And she said, 'No harm, but benefit.' And I said, 'Swearing by your father?' And she said, 'Swearing by my father.' 'Swearing by the Koran,' I said. 'Swearing by the Koran.' 'On the head of your son?' 'On the head of my son.' She wishes you to go to her at once."

"Where is she?"

"In a room below."

"Let us go."

We make, as on the former occasion, for the side of the courtyard facing the gate. We enter the heavy-doored room as before. A woman is standing in it with a small lamp in her hand. I see it is of silver. Her sheet, or veil, is open, does not conceal her face. A stout-faced, middle-aged, good-looking woman, with keen, though kindly eyes. She fixes them on me in sharp scrutiny. For a moment I look only at her. Then throwing a glance around I start, for I perceive that this is not the room in which I had been before, with Munsoor Khan—there is not here the same disposal of things, the same furniture. But the stout-faced lady, stout of person too, has turned round and made an opening as it were in a wall, by slide of panel or opening of door, I know not, and following her I have passed into a gallery, not the tunnel with its marble-smooth walls and its arched roof, its sanded floor and slits to let in the air, but an ordinary, domestic passage, with whitewashed walls and flat timber roof of the usual kind. This is a relief. I feel somewhat uncomfortable when coming to a door in one of its sides she opens it, and motioning Bhola Ram to pass through, relocks it. But this matter has to be gone through with. The corridor was not a long one. The Mother opens the door at the end of it and, motioning me to stand still, steps out, then beckons to me and locks the door behind us. We are in another corridor. She moves quickly

along it; stops before a heavy silk curtain, raises it, motions me to go through. Had I passed through a silken curtain before?"

"Treachery? hostility?"

"No—friendliness—too much."

"On the Koran?"

"Yes. In! Quick! This is a frequented corridor."

I pass in. She follows.

"Go on—to the farthest apartment—the third one."

"Why——?"

"Go on. Time is precious—every single moment."

I had been about to ask why Maud Alexander was here—why here by herself.

This is a small, square room—an ante-chamber. I traverse a long, oblong room, dimly lighted; then pass into a smaller, but spacious room, its end semi-circular, brightly lighted. The sudden, superior brightness dazzles me, confuses me, for I seem to hear the foolish, fond jingle of the house of the incarnation—the sanctuary in the wilderness. I see a figure in the hollow of the round. It is not in English, but in oriental dress. The veil is thrown back from the eager, watching face, with its blazing black eyes. "John, my life!" or "My life, my life!"—the poor jingle means either, both, to her—she exclaims in soulful, soul-moving accents. It is Ayesha. She has come down from a daïs. She sinks back on it. She does not mount on to it, and sit down on it cross-legged, after the usual manner. The unwonted emotion induces an unwonted position. She has simply sat down on its edge. I sit down beside her; in the hurry and confusion of my own emotion, very close to her; on her left-hand side. I feel the throbbing of her heart. The might of human love beat in her bosom, for it looked forth from her eyes. I could not be insensible. I took her little hand in mine. She looked up at me. Her bosom heaved; there came from it a sigh. She murmured the little play on words, which seemed to mean so much to her, with a deep intensity of feeling. I held her hand. Emotion begets emotion. Affection begets affection. Love is precious, so gratifying, so compelling. It was so strong with her—I bow my head as I write it.

"Loved one," she said. "Loved altogether, with all my

heart and soul and all the strength of my life, the life you saved."

How could I be indifferent? Love awakens love, passion passion, so that all is forgotten but the momenr. But I had a genuine love for her, not as the other, not antagonistic to it, not derogatory to it, as truthful, sacred, though not rising so to the full heights of my being. There must be no poor self-love and vanity here. There must be no dishonesty here, in consort with that honest love. I had thought to draw her to me. I drop her hand.

"Beyond all bounds I love you." The words must remain ever sacred with me.

"I press too close upon you," I said, and withdraw a little from her. "I can see you better now." I turn toward her. "How wonderful to find you here."

"The Nuwâb Ali Karim is my uncle on the mother's side."

"But at this moment."

"You knew not that I was here, in this apartment. So near you."

"Near me?"

"Through that little window you can see the balcony of the apartments in which you were lodged——"

"As a prisoner."

"I know. And I called to you once—I could not call again—I had not the chance—because of others with me here."

"I heard the words, but I thought it must be memory speaking. I was gazing down on the plain, and wondering where the house of the avâtar lay."

"I could show you the direction; you cannot see the place; daily do I gaze that way."

"Strange that you should be here now, at this moment."

"The will of God. For your benefit. You saved my life. I am sent to save yours. And that has to be attended to. Oh, when I saw you first, just now, I could think of nothing but my love. It filled my soul. My mind. Thought of nothing but it, because we may never meet again. But now I must think of nothing but your dear life. You must leave the castle at once."

"How? I am under lock and key. Locked and double locked in."

"I can manage it. To-morrow you must eat of nothing but what I give you to-night. No other food—there may be danger in it. I will arrange for letting you out of the fortress to-morrow night."

"Why not this night?" I say, eager for them.

"I could not manage it to-night."

"Delays are dangerous."

"So is precipitation. Would I not let thee out of the pit to-night, oh, my beloved, if I could? Didst thou not save my life, and would I lag in saving thine?"

"Munsoor Khan was to have delivered me on a to-morrow night, and he never came."

"Munsoor Khan! How?"

"He was to have come to me at midnight, taken me out of the fortress down to a boat, and we were to have dropped down the river in that."

"He going with you?"

"Yes."

"With his plunder."

"His plunder?"

"The money and jewels he could lay hands on."

"I was to reward him well, at Tulsipore, or other English station."

"Be sure he meant to take the plunder too, clever Master Munsoor Khan—a double haul. But he came not."

"No—and another has taken his place—one most inimical."

"I know. You must leave the place as soon as possible. One will come to you to-morrow night with this as token"—she holds up a curious amulet. "Follow him—no other. He will lead you out of the fortress, down to the river, to a boat—as he had arranged, the cunning Munsoor Khan—you can go down the river in that until you reach the Ganges, or better, as that is far and the arm of the Nuwâb long, stop about thirty miles from here and take shelter in Dharmnagar, the fortress of Dharm Singh, where you will be quite safe."

"That likewise did Munsoor Khan propose."

"Of course he would think of it too. He would think of getting into a safe place as quickly as possible for his own

sake, for he would know what would await him at the hands of the Nuwâb if he fell into them."

"Yes, and I thought it would be better for my friends to find safe shelter in that fortress at once. They could proceed from there in a more comfortable manner and under safe escort."

"Your friends!"

"The two ladies and the boy."

"The two ladies and the boy——"

"Yes; they that are here."

"Here! Those! Your friends? They?"

"You remember that morning in the dwelling-place of the avâtar?"

"Remember it! Can I ever forget it?"

"When you said of your great goodness, your kindness——"

"That I loved you, and wished you to remain with us, and become a Mussulman, and be married to me."

"And I said——"

"That from before your love was given to a girl of your own race and faith, to whom you were not betrothed, but hoped to be, who was not more beautiful than I."

"To her am I betrothed now."

"Where did you meet her? Where went you from the sanctuary?"

"To the fortress of the zemindar Tukht Singh."

"Oonchagaon. I know. Met you her there?"

"No."

"Where went you from there?"

"I came here."

"Then where did you meet her?"

"Here."

"Here!"

"She is one of the two ladies here—the unmarried one."

"She, who has caused so much disturbance here, in this household! But how could you meet her?"

"Munsoor Khan conducted me to their apartments."

"Conducted you to their apartments! By order?"

"No, secretly."

Her black eyes were very powerful. They had expressed love very strongly; they now blazed anger.

"The rogue! The villain! The deceiver! The betrayer of his trust! That was why he was removed from his post, and may he have met with his just desert. And be sure he has. May he have his hands and feet cut off and his eyes put out! The scoundrel! The base, unworthy, miserable wretch! He to release prisoners! He to violate the sanctity of the zenana! Introduce you into it—to see her! May he rot in his grave if he be dead, and suffer the pangs of hell if he be alive!"

"Where shall I meet my friends to-morrow night?"

"Meet your friends?"

"The two ladies and the boy."

"Meet them—why? Wherefore?"

"To go with them."

"But they go not."

"Go not—how can I go without them?"

"What have I to do with saving *them?*"

"I cannot go without them."

"What have I to do," she goes on vehemently, "with saving her—the leprous-faced one——"

"Hush! hush!"

"In my heart to do everything for you: not in my heart to do anything for her."

"For my sake. You say I saved your life: her deliverance would be more to me than my own—million-fold. I cannot depart without them—by myself. I came to be with them."

"But what danger to you here—what danger, if the wrath of the Nuwâb is kindled against you, as it seemeth it is, because of this meeting with your friends! I knew there was danger when I heard of this removal of Munsoor Khan, the substitution of Sher Khan. I thought it was only because he hates all of your religion and race. But now—with this cause—how Ali Karim's wrath will flame! A terrible man my uncle to those he loves not. He will be here to-morrow night——"

"To-night."

"No, to-morrow night now. It may mean to you the underground cell, torture, death."

"Torture or death, I go not without them. I go not without them for your sake."

"For my sake!"

"How should I be worthy of the favour you have shown me if I escaped and left behind me the wife and sister and son of my dearest friend? acted so basely? Would you deem me a true man?"

"But it jeopardises your escape. The removal of so many. Three more people—women—a child. It would add so terribly to the danger."

A signal twang on a guitar.

"Oh, my God, the end of our meeting! Oh, my beloved, go thou by thyself."

"I cannot. I leave not the fortress without them. With them I go: with them I remain."

"Ah me! Art thou so determined?—so fixed in this?"

"Most truly."

"Not to change?"

"Never."

"Then be it so, whatever chance. Follow him who brings this amulet. You will meet the others. He will pass you out of the fortress. I will arrange. No other could—know that."

"I know, I know. You will have been our saviour."

A cough at the door of the room announced that the Mother of the Harem was there: had come for me.

"Our parting, and for ever!" said the girl as she stood up, I with her. "What grief! What woe! What hurt!" she exclaimed, as she seized my arm with both her hands and looked up at me—such a look. Then she removed her hands and said quickly, "Eat not the food brought to-morrow. The Mother will give you a packet."

"Come," said the voice at the door.

"Go, and God, the All-powerful, protect you, and conduct you in safety to your native land; and when there, oh, sometimes think of Ayesha," and she clasped her hands upon her breast.

"Blessings and thanks infinite. Never can I forget you."

There are looks that remain.

Before the Mother of the Harem closed the door at the foot of the little staircase behind me, she handed me a packet—a knotted napkin. I throw this on the daïs in my outer room

and hurry through the inner one on to the balcony. The beautifully pierced panel does not stand out: the window is dark. Below the vast dim expanse.

After an unknown time I go in and place the daïs well against the outer door. I must do my best to live until to-morrow night.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GAIN AND LOSS

WHEN I remove my daïs barrier the next morning it occurs to me that I had better not leave the knotted napkin conspicuous on it. I remove it—hide it away.

The hours pass. The gong notes their passage. The courtyard, by its emptying and filling, of shadow and light, serves as a clepsydra.

The two serving-men appear. As one puts down the food, while the other is setting down in a corner the new *surahi* of drinking water, he says to me, with a pleasant smile—

"A good dinner to-day, sir; eat well of it."

"Why good to-day?"

"Been specially prepared in the Nuwâb Sahib's own kitchen."

"You villain!" I think: a most good-humoured-looking man.

When they are gone I survey the dishes with a curious interest. Arsenic is it? The commonest poison. In which dish? In the curry, the curds, or the cakes? My first impulse is to empty them all out over the balcony; remove them instantaneously from me. Has the reader ever been in contact with poisoned food? I leave the curry, empty away the curds, leave some broken fragments of cakes in the same dish, throw the rest away. I then fetch the napkin, of beautifully fine linen, untie its four corners: unleavened cakes of an exquisite delicacy and whiteness: a delicious confection: these from the hands of love and not of hate.

The same two men come again in the evening.

"Why, sahib, you have eaten none of the curry?" says the pleasant-faced man.

"The day was too hot."

They are gone.

When will the amulet-bearer come? Will he come? In the dead of the night when the household is asleep? Before or after midnight? About then, if he comes at all. But after that first experience the fear of disappointment is ever upon me. I count the hours with varying feelings as I had done then. They cannot come early, and yet I had gone into the verandah ready when the eight quick strokes had followed the eight slow ones. I cannot leave it. I fetch a light wicker-work stool and place it by the railing, and sit down upon it. I stand up. I move about. Oh, terrible hours of waiting! Oh, hours of infinite length! Nine strokes, ten, eleven. Then came the twelve slow strokes, as if the man striking them felt the solemnity of the hour, then the mellow rattle of the following twelve quick strokes. A gleam of light in the courtyard. A man crossing it. He must have been told to come on the stroke of midnight. He has entered the verandah below. I hear the chain drop. I hurry down the staircase. I pause on the last step. "Friend?" I ask. He holds a little circular lantern with its door slid back a bit high up, puts the amulet into the issuing pencil of light. "But where are *they?*" "Come," he says, in a low, smothered voice from beneath the end of his loose turban, which is wound round the lower part of his face. I follow him. We make not for the gate. We pass into the feigned store-room and traverse the gallery, as I had done with the stout Mother the night before. We are in the corridor into which Ayesha's suite of apartments opened. But the lad—I see by the figure, and not by the face, which the turban-fold drawn across it mostly hides, that it is a lad, not a man—goes not that way: the opposite. We keep in the corridor, whose darkness the faint glimmer from the lantern hardly illumines, for a very long way. The heat in it is stifling. Then with a relief, a delight, felt even at that moment, the open air, a moist, cool air: we are in an arcade by the side of a garden. We enter the garden. We follow a walk beneath the trees. A rapidly increasing sound—the sound of approaching footsteps. The lad steps away from the walk, behind a tree, and covers the lantern in the folds of his long linen coat. The man passes within a few yards of us,

the sound of his shoed feet receding into the distance. Swiftly once more along the walk. The slender-columned, Moorish-arched arcade again. Along it. The deep, heavy, gasping, choking, stertorous snoring of a sleeper on the ground. Some men sleeping on a carpet, not in the arcade, just without it, in the open. We steal by close against the inner wall. Another long, interior corridor. A child crying and being hushed; moan of a sleeper; creak of bed; but mostly stifling silence. Relief and an open verandah again. The boy stands still and listens. "Where——" I whisper to him. "Hush!" and the rest of my sentence, "are they?" remains unuttered. We move on. An open space. A high blank wall. We follow it. The lad coughs. An answering cough. A group of persons. The Mother of the Harem, Maud Alexander, Mary with Philip in her arms. "Let me take him." I am close to her.

"*Chup!* (Be silent!)"—the Mother. The lad has gone up to a door in the wall and turned the key in the lock and pushed at it—but it moves not, holds its place.

"You," says the Mother.

I push it back with some difficulty; not only is it heavy but apparently rusty on its hinges, as if it had not been opened for a very long time. That inference seems justified when we pass into a small inclosure filled with trees and bushes. It shows a tangled wilderness. The walks and paths are grass-grown. Not only that but it is filled with a multitude of birds, as indicated by their stir and movement, showing that they have found here a safe retreat and harbourage and breeding-place undisturbed by the presence of man. As we move along there is about us an incessant rustle and twitter, a continual swoop and flutter and beat of wings. We have disturbed a very ancient solitary reign. Bats wheel about us. Owls sweep noiseless overhead. Day birds dash wildly by. Now we have a wall towering high above us; not the wall through which we entered; this is too massive and high, it must be one of the battlements. The lad moves his lantern about. He makes his way through an intricacy of bushes. A small open space before a short wicket in a deep recess. On either side of the recess a stack of bricks. I understand. This is to enable the recess to be filled in with solid masonry in case of an emergency. The lad opens the

wicket. He signs for us, my friends and I, to pass through. "Back quick," says the Mother to him. We are in a little open space which has around it a thick mass of bushes, evidently to mask and hide the wicket. We move along for some time amid bushes. Then the mysterious murmur and the myriad close-standing stems and we are in the inclosing bamboo jungle. What a winding path! Now, from the scent of the flowers, we are in the outer belt of acacia trees. Then we descend into a hollow. It must be a ravine leading down to the river. It opens out gradually. Now on the river bank. But where the boat? I see it not. Now it has slid down. It must have been lying concealed under the bank higher up. We have passed in—my God! we have passed in—the whole of us! I feel for a gold piece to give the lad. He is throwing a light on the boat from his lantern. We have got in at the bow; the ladies and child have seated themselves on the benches. We have begun to put off when the lad too enters, jumps in, and squats down on the broad square end of the boat—astonishing in what a small place a native can squat himself. I will pay him hereafter. All thought now on the getting away. Now we will pull away hard. No, the two rowers sit with the big beam-like oars idle in their hands. I see. We must drop past the fortress silently. How high up above us it looms—a dark mass against the sky. How slowly the mass recedes! One gleam of light—it must be from Ayesha's window? She will be awake to get note of our escape. The wider stream and the house—is that the ferry? We have passed by it. Round a corner. "Oars!" says the man at the rudder. Splash, splash, the broad board blades—if so they may be called—strike the water. I listen for the sound of oars behind. But only the splash, splash of our own, slow but steady. The star-lit surface of the water, the dim outline of the banks on either side.

"Thank God!" I say.

"Thank God!" says Maud Alexander.

"Thank God!" says Mary softly.

"*Chup!*" says the lad, squatted near us, quickly.

Splash, splash, steadily onward. The men pull hard, half rising to the oars. Sometimes the distant barking of a dog; but, mostly, no sound but the creaking of the beam-like oars in

the ill-made rowlocks, and the splash of their broad blades on the water; regular, persistent. "With strength, with full strength," I call to the oarsmen, "and well shall you be rewarded."

"And you, too," I say to the lad.

"*Chup!*" he says, in muffled voice.

Onward, splash, splash. The stars pale. The eastern horizon, toward which we move, begins to glow. The high sides of the hollow of the river stand out. We can see one another's faces. I can see the face of my beloved. She is seated opposite me. Our eyes meet. We have escaped. We are free. We have escaped out of the wild beast's den. We are betrothed. We exchange looks of strong emotion. I rise up and cross over. I seat myself by her side. I take her hand in mine. "Mary, darling!" I whisper. "My own! my own!" It is an overpowering moment. I like not the exhibition, by word or deed, of strong emotion in public. But it is an overpowering moment, and it is not so much in public. The man at the helm is standing up against the long tiller, but the boat, or rather barge, is a long one. The rowers have their backs to us. Maud is busy with Philip. There is no one near us but the young servitor with the loose end of his turban round his face; perchance asleep, dozing—his head is on his knee. The touch of her hand sends a thrill through every nerve in my body. There is a thrill in my voice as I whisper, "My love! My life!" My being is stirred to its profoundest depth. She looks at me. She cannot choose but look. My soul draws hers. She turns her beautiful face slowly round toward me. In my eyes is the flaming of my heart. I feel it. She drops her eyes. She withdraws her hand. The strength of that love-look has startled, overpowered her. In the course of a varied life I have had occasion to note how intensely, how vividly, a strong emotion—such as anger, fear, horror, hatred, religious fervour, as some I can recall—may display itself sometimes on the human countenance. My face, no doubt, displayed love to the utmost, for I felt it to the utmost. There is a low cry of pain. It is from Ayesha's trusty boy agent.

I look toward him. He struggles up, is standing on the broad end of the boat. What is it? What has he seen? The morning is now clear. "What is it?" I cry.

I jump up. The morning is now clear. The lad is near; but for a moment I see him as not seeing. My thoughts and feelings had been deeply engaged. We all know how with such preoccupation it is difficult to turn the attention from one thing to another; difficult to understand, even to hear, what is said to you suddenly, to see what is presented suddenly to your gaze. His turban has been disturbed; the fold has fallen away from his face. Our eyes meet.

"Ayesha!" I exclaim.

She has leaped into the river. A moment to drop sword and pistol, and I have leaped in after her. I cast my eyes down the river as I rise to the surface, but I see nothing of her. We were here in a swift race close under the bank. It would carry her away. I swim down it with strongest stroke; but I see nothing upon the now bright surface of the water. I look onward, this way and that—nothing; I look back—nothing but the broad, square bow of the boat. From it come shouts and cries. I hear the quickened splash of the oars. The swirling stream must have carried her under, and she may rise lower down. I strike into the full strength of the race—its mid-current. I was a very powerful swimmer. But my clothes, if light, are constricting. I have my shoes on. Some of the swirls prove almost too much for me. I have great difficulty in getting away from them. Even outside the race I can now float only on my back. The boat has come up to me. "Come in, sir." "Have you seen her?" "No." I strike out again. No sign of her. I am quite exhausted now. They haul me into the boat.

"Did you see her rise? See her anywhere?"

"Her—the sahib's mind has become confused," says the boat-master. "We saw nothing of the lad after he fell in—not once, not anywhere. He must have gone under immediately, and been carried away. I looked and steered along the edge of the race. Drowned for sure. A lad I knew not. Ahead a village we must avoid. We must to the other side. Pull! Hard! Together!"

I stand there for a while shivering and shaking. Then I move up to the bow very miserable, shivering in soul and body.

"Mr. Hayman!" cried Maud, in a tone of deep emotion, as I sank down on the bench, "how brave of you——"

"It was a woman," said Mary.

"It was a woman," I said.

But it was not a time for talk or explanation or lamentation. This the time of greatest stir and movement, over the land above, on the river below; the time of greatest congregation by the side of the water, on bank or ghaut; people come down to wash and pray, to water their animals, to carry back water for domestic purposes. In making for the other side of the river we cross the line of a ferry, come almost in contact with the ferry-boat. From it a sudden yell, shouts of "Feringhee! Feringhee!" A volley of foul abuse. I seize my sword and pistol. Among the passengers by the boat are some sepoys. They are not in uniform, but I recognise them at once. They shout to our boatmen to stop, to their own men to pursue. Will our men obey? I take my pistol by the butt. They do not. The ferry-boat keeps on her way; there are in her other people besides the sepoys, the latter have no means of compulsion, have not their muskets. We are soon wide apart. But it was an uncomfortable moment. We have to be continually on the look-out. The boat being slowly tugged up stream by the long file of half-bent, slow-moving towers, having over their shoulders the long thin lines at which they strain—we do not mind that. But constantly we are passed by, or pass, boats going down stream like ourselves. It is toward these that we look anxiously, watch them anxiously from the first moment that we catch sight of them; most closely, anxiously, when we see them overtaking us; any one of them may be in pursuit of us, may be filled with the Nuwâb's men. That boat putting off from the bank and making to cross our path, she may be putting off to intercept us. This close-swimming herd of buffaloes crossing the river in a black mass; the boys in charge standing upright on their backs shout "Feringhee! Feringhee!" They cannot hurt us, but the knowledge of our being on the river will spread along the banks. There are towns and fortresses along the river which we have to pass by, at greater or less distance according to the run of the stream. This town—the long lines of steps of its ghaut are crowded with people, the sudden bustle and stir among whom shows that we are observed. There are boats by the ghaut. Will they put out after us? They do not. We

enter a long, narrow, solitary reach of the river with high steep banks on either side. At the end of it I ask of the boat-master, the *nakhuda*, which is, syllable by syllable, "boat god," how far we are now from our destination. "Not very far after we pass that fortress; there, on the left bank." We have reached the fortress, are passing it by. We look up at it crowning the bank with its low circular bastions. A sudden roar, a splash in the water. We have been fired at from its walls, from that centre bastion. "Is that the morning gun, mother?" says Philip, awakening from his sleep. The morning gun is fired in all our military cantonments.

"Is it a salute, mother?" he asks, as two other reports follow. There is a very constant sounding of salutes in India.

One of the shots has passed very close over the boat.

"Oh, Kewati!" calls one of the oarsmen, who had ducked his head as it rushed over, to the boat-master, "this is not in our agreement. We came not to be shot at. There!"

Another shot close over the boat. I had seen the flash, heard the roar, the humming through the air, and now saw the round shot, a nine-pounder I judged from the report, go ricochetting down the river.

"Pull harder! so shall we be sooner out of reach of the balls," cries Kewati.

I note how the mother has bent down over the boy. Have they, in the fort, been informed of our being on the water, fired at us because of their own enmity, as an excitement, amusement, or has the Nuwâb sent his horsemen after us, sent word to them here to stop us?

A couple of discharges more. But it is long shooting now. The current sets away from the bluff on which the fortress stands. But as we look back we see a boat put out from under the fortress.

The foremost oarsman, he who had been troubled by the close passage of the shot, calls out,

"A boat, coming after us, Kewati."

"So there is," says Kewati, as he leans against the heavy tiller. "Coming in pursuit of us. So—yes," he says quietly, as he glances back, "in pursuit." He seems to me to take it somewhat too quietly—too indifferently.

water takes place every day: all life, and therefore ours, is sacred here. There is about the whole place the strange, haunting quiet of a great mansion or town not adequately occupied. But a few people on the long-stretching ghauts: but a few people in the long streets: in the wide square: long lines of houses and shops unoccupied: I ask the boat-master why?

"They are occupied at the time of the great annual fair. The town is quite full then. The town is built with reference to that period. Then multitudes come to bathe in the sacred, healing water; to buy and sell. At other times it is as you see it now."

CHAPTER XXIX

A HAVEN OF SAFETY AND DELIGHT

AT Dharmnagar we passed seven days—seven golden days. We ran into the safe haven from the storm-vexed, dangerous sea: we reached the life-giving oasis from the death-dealing desert. To me it was the oasis in the journey of life, the Isle of the Blest in the voyage of existence. When I recall the time, as sometimes I wish to and sometimes I do not, it comes back to me as in a golden dream. Safety, quiet, peace: the joy of escape: and to me the divine bliss of love. This is a personal record. Safety after what danger! quiet after what turmoil! escape from what danger! escape from what apprehension—which if the reader has not shared with me it is because I did not care to dwell on it—apprehension of things worse than torture and death: the racking of the body, what that to the torture of the soul? death, a blessing compared to those abysmal depths of degradation and shame. No wonder all our hearts leaped light.

There was the physical agreeableness and delight. We were well lodged. We had a beautiful set of apartments, large and cool and airy, which on one side looked down into a pretty garden, on the other commanded a wide fine view. There was the atmosphere of kindness, the lavish attention to our wants. There was the ample supply of food and drink—ample, choice, and delicate; the variety of cakes, of fine meal, with which you could eat your food so cleanly and well without harsh knife or fork; the variety of excellent dishes: rice of a delicate grain and an exquisite sweetness, such as we had never seen before; the fruit, not of the land (at this dead season it produces none), but the grapes and apples of Caubul: the many sherbets, the well-cooled water, choicest

drink of all. We had numerous attendants, deft and kindly, attentive, exquisitely clean in dress and person.

We had the relief and delight of a change of season. It was like the removal of a heavy weight, the release of a choking, constricting band, the stepping from an over-heated room into the open air, a sudden rush of relief and of delight. This dead intermediate time is one of the worst periods of the year: described of old once and for ever, "when the heaven that is over thy head shall be brass and the earth that is under thee shall be iron." The earth baked dry. The air dead still and motionless. No mitigating power in the brief night; the flaming sun pouring down an unbroken flood of heat and radiance during all the long day. During the days and nights in the den of iniquity from which we had just escaped my thoughts and feelings were so occupied that I made but slight mention of the heat, but it had been terrible. The night of our arrival here the rain came, "the monsoon broke." The great cloud mass rolled up from the east. The lightning flashed, long and bright: the thunder rolled, deep and heavy: the deluge fell. The next morning Nature awoke to a new life. "The water which is the life" had come. She laughed out. The people shared in her joy. With them the same rejoicing as with us in the springtime in England, but with a deeper joy. For it means a great dread removed. When the rain is delayed in its coming there rises up before the cultivator the dread spectre of Famine. If delayed too long it may mean no produce from his fields, the death of his cattle, and, in those days, it might mean that there was nothing left for him and his wife and children but to lie down on the fruitless earth and die. A sudden thrill ran through the land. The softened earth can now be broken and the seed put into it: there will now be herbage on the grazing-grounds. There will be food for man and beast. The ploughmen hurry forth. The late solitary, silent fields are now populous; from them comes the joyous sound of labour. We could not but share in the universal joy. And my two ladies and the boy had a direct personal share in it. For now in the general outburst of pleasure the women and girls put up their swings under the fresh-washed trees and sing their vernal songs—swinging sing, and singing swing. This took place here, in

the inner garden of the zenana, and they, the other members of our party, were asked to take part in the merry-making. And that intercourse with the ladies of the household also—but to finish with the season change.

How delightful the cool, moist air—the cool breeze! How delightful the cool, long sleep! And there was now the rare pleasure of clouds. The great cloud mass had passed on, but it had left behind it a trail of scattered clouds which moved across the sky before the soft eastern breeze for the next four or five days, taking on as they sailed over the most beautiful tints of pink and brown, casting down soft moving shadows on the earth. There were gorgeous sunsets. Now was thrown into the landscape what had not been in it for many a month past—colour and distance. We all three took a great pleasure in scenery; but to Mary Alexander and myself especially there was a very deep delight in a fine view, a great joy in a beautiful landscape. And there were many of these to be found here. In the now tempered golden sunshine, with the new flush of green upon it, with the drifting clouds making continual play of shade and sunshine, massing into great snowy peaks and promontories on the far distant western horizon, the vast champaign below us, with its woods and groves and villages, presented a splendid prospect the whole day long. There were many pretty views along the margin of the sacred channel, both on its town and its island side. The prettiest was from the end of the island looking down stream. To the right, airily piled up, in confused irregularity, such as that of phantasy or dream, the white-walled, flat-terraced houses of the town shimmered in the haze between the strong block of the fortress, our home, above, and the graceful lines of ghauts and temples below: to the left lay the many-groved island, with its beautiful commingling of foliage: along the edge of the water, on the island side, stood huge banian trees and many small ghauts and small temples, on the town side extended the noble lines of steps of two or three splendid ghauts, above which, amid varied foliage, rose high up the tapering, fretted spires, showed the square block and projecting porch, of the four great temples: and all, on either side, temple, tree, grove, ghaut, houses, fortress, was reflected in the water.

We enjoyed moving about in the town, which and the island were quite safe to us, because of their sacred character and of the power of their lord our host. There hung over them an indescribable air of repose and quiet; a placidity, a hush. All violence was banished from them. The town just now was more than half empty. The tameness of the birds and beasts, and of the fish, due to their being unmolested and fed, added to the general sense of peace and quiet and amity. The Brahminee bulls wandered about, fat, tame, and sleek. Birds hopped and flew around you quite close. Even the pariah dogs, elsewhere so gaunt and fierce, here were fat and smiling. We often stopped to see the pretty sight of the pigeons being fed. But what Philip loved best was to get to the water's edge on one of the ghauts and feed the fish. Two or three bits of unleavened cake thrown on the water, and soon a shoal was below us, and it was delightful to watch the movements—the quick dart of the little fish, the swift, sinuous rush of the big ones; to watch them hang and move about in easy security and quiet; rise and sink so softly; move about with a fine delicacy of motion, in curves of exquisite beauty; circle through the water more gracefully than the doves and pigeons above through the air. The boy put his hand with food in it below the surface of the water, and the small fish soon formed a silvery circle round it: or the hand was Mary's.

Or we crossed over to the island, in our host and protector's own boat, and passed there many hours wandering about among the groves or sitting by the margin of the stream, while the boy flitted about happy as a butterfly.

Then the indoor life was full of interest, more especially to the ladies, and through them to me. For they had now the rare and oft-wished-for experience of entry to a zenana. Whether exceptional or not, here, to judge by what they told me, and what I learnt from my own attendants, was no confirmation of the ordinary notion of a zenana as a dirty cage, though with golden wires, in which was kept a pretty bird, breeding and feeding its only permitted occupation. In fact, here was a case, as there are, no doubt, plenty others, of a native lady whose life, however different in outward circumstances, owing to differences of race and climate and material adjuncts, was

in essentials the same as that of a lady in a similar position, the wife of a landed proprietor, in England two hundred years or so back—and I may pause to say that in judging of home life in India we should remember that if there is in many ways with regard to speech and action a greater coarseness, a lower level of delicacy and refinement, than with us now, the same was the case with our ancestors of those two hundred years or so back. If like her English prototype our hostess had little book learning or general information, she had a thorough knowledge of everything about her, was a most capable manager of her household and family affairs. She took a prominent part in the management of her husband's domain because of his visionary character. I heard of her as kind and beneficent, if imperious; as "renowned" for her piety, her intellect, her goodness of heart, for the generous if strong hand. The two ladies found her a handsome, stately woman, with a fine bearing and carriage, who showed them exceeding kindness. She showed the greatest sympathy with them in their dangers, suffering, and loss. "You are now a widow," she said to Maud Alexander, "no evil greater than that. What woe to live on the earth separated from your husband! Truly, it was wrong of your Government to deprive us of our cherished rite of Sati." They went daily into the zenana and spent many hours there. A real friendship sprang up between them and the Tara Bhai, made the greater by the delight her children had in the company of Philip, by their tempestuous liking for him. Their telling me what they had seen and heard in the zenana made a continual subject of talk. There was much of it very amusing. They were the first English women the Tara Bhai and the other ladies of the zenana had spoken to, seen near even. There was perpetual eager questioning as to their mode of life: they were full of curiosity and wonderment.

"They made Mary take down her hair and put it up again," said Maud.

Mary had very beautiful hair, of a rich brown hue and very abundant, which went well with her deep blue Irish eyes.

"The Tara Bhai said to Mary: 'You are very beautiful.'"

"Oh no, no!" cried Mary.

Of course she was.

"You know she did," went on Maud. "Then she added: 'But you would look more beautiful if you wore a nose-ring. The face looks so naked without it.' How would you like Mary to wear a nose-ring, John?"

"Well, it would be rather in the way of——"

"Eating, of course," said Maud, while Mary blushed. "You meant eating."

"Well, no," I said.

"Hush, John!" said Mary.

They often found me too literal.

I had several interviews with our host, but I never established the same friendly relations with him, Dharm Singh of Dharmnagar, as I had with Tukht Singh of Oonchagaon.

Dharm Singh, as I learned from my attendants, was a man of renowned and extraordinary piety; foremost in works of beneficence. He dug wells and tanks; planted trees; built ghauts and temples; fed the Brahmins and the poor; cherished all animal life; had made all the great pilgrimages; was unfailing in the performance of all his religious duties; profuse in offerings; given to devout contemplation, as prescribed for attaining to perfection; plain in his apparel; simple in his diet—everything he ate was not only cooked, but cultivated, by Brahmins; a most devout and holy man. And that made the division between us. Not on my part, but his. When I went to see him his whole desire was to be kind and courteous, not to offend. But there was an involuntary Brahminical aloofness, a shrinking away, as if my moral and physical effluvium was not agreeable to him, as if I were offensive to him, indeed, stank in his nostrils. Was I not of a murderous race? Was I not an eater of the flesh of kine? Under these circumstances I did not care to prolong my conversations with him. Besides, he always gave the talk a character which prevented me from taking any sustained part in it. He would not talk about the circumstances of the hour, about the outbreak, with reference to which he made the one remark that it was due to our killing of kine, that had provoked the wrath of the gods against us. He would only talk not politics but metaphysics. His most constant theme was the sanctity of all life, that effluence of the bright influence uncreate.

"I hope you have slept well?"

"By your beneficence," I answer.

"Blessed sleep!" he says; "the daily *Nirvana* (blowing out)." And then he discourses of Nirvana.

On the other hand, he was most kindly in his acts; nothing could exceed his generosity and care for our comfort.

But above and beyond all else there was to me the divine joy of love. My beloved, with whom had just been sealed the everlasting compact, was here, and I had close and constant communion with her. Our companionship was of a continuous and intimate character such as it could not have been under any ordinary circumstances. There were none of the usual diffidences and restraints and want of opportunity. We were continually alone together. Maud Alexander was much occupied with her boy. He claimed the most of her attention and companionship. No closer bond than that of mother and child. And our withoutness from that drew us the closer together. In the present solitude of the island we three would sit down in some shady grove, while Philip sported about near; or, while he pursued his favourite amusement of feeding the fish, we three would sit together by the edge of the river—the Twister it was named, because of its windings. We talked, or we sat wordless, in the leafy silence of the dense grove, deepened, not broken, by the cooing of the doves; by the side of the water, its lip-lap in our ears, our eyes following its lapse. But in the house Maud was drawn continually, through Philip, into the life of the zenana. And she had now her own thoughts to think, of the past and of the future, and solitude on the island was welcome to her. And so we other two wandered about in it together, along the banian's pillared aisles of shade, or under the wide-sweeping boughs of the ancient mango trees, which made such beautiful vistas before us as we moved on, entranced. How beautiful the combination and contrast of the line of feathery young palm trees by the side of the thick-columned, dark-foliaged banian! How beautiful this avenue of sheeshum trees, with their graceful drooping boughs, and the pretty chequering of light and shade beneath! We sat in the innermost shady bower, sacred and sequestered, of some great banian, in the innermost shrine of the great leafy temple, with its "dim religious light," its soft chant of doves, or symphony of other birds, nature's choristers, with sacred clasp of

hand, and hallowed embrace, and holy kiss, with words of love and tenderness, until thought's melody became too sweet for utterance, and we sat silent and overcome, wrapped in our passion's golden purity. The isle was our Garden of Eden, our sweet Paradise. Or we went up to its upper end as the sun was setting in glory and gazed at the beautiful view looking down the sacred channel. Or we went down to its lower end and looked down the broad expanse of the full width of the river, and it carried our thoughts onward to the great sacred city of Benares, of interest to us now, at this moment, solely because of the English troops stationed there, onward to Calcutta, the point of help, to the sea, which everywhere leads to England.

Then within doors we had a great part of the day to ourselves, Maud Alexander being busy with Philip, or away with him in the zenana. Days of busy, eager talk, or silent companionship, mutual dreaming. We sat in the shady back verandah above a garden-courtyard which with the golden sunlight falling on the broad green masses of leaves, on brilliant clusters of flowers, formed a pleasant adjunct though not looked at much, for we sat weaving swift language from impassioned themes, or silent, enthralled in the sense of our proximity.

And we sat there in the quiet of the afternoon deeper than that of night. And that golden quiet seemed to symbolise the divine restfulness, surpassing all active joy, which had now fallen on my spirit. There was an end of the restlessness of the soul seeking for its mate. The turmoil was ended. The divine, everlasting haven was reached. Soul had met soul, never to part. In her was the concentration of that communion and sympathy which man seeks with his kind. Here was the doubling of one's life by the sharing with another of one's thoughts and feelings and sympathies and recollections; of one's whole being, intellectual, imaginative, sensitive.

The shadow of the past was upon us, the sorrow of the loss of husband, brother and friend. And with me was the additional grief, great, profound, of the self-sacrifice of poor Ayesha. But the present is potent, its demands imperative. It has the advantage of the past. If not an opiate it is an

anodyne. If it cannot obliterate, it can soften, must overlay, the memories of the past. We see in ordinary life how the small daily cares, the needs of the body, are stronger than love or death. The present here was vivid, insistent, fraught with tremendous issues. And the future pressed. Now that her husband was dead, Maud Alexander had to arrange for her immediate future, for her going home with the boy. We had much talk about that. The future was not so uncertain that we should take no thought of it. We were surrounded by danger. But we were safe here. And we were buoyed up, as all had been since the outbreak, by the thought that Delhi must soon fall, and with its fall would return the ancient peace. By the death of her brother, to whom she had come out, the ordered course of Mary Alexander's life had been disturbed too; she too had to take thought for her future movements. She had a sister in another part of India: would her mother wish her to go to her, or return with Maud? Here I interposed. She must do neither. She must marry me. She must make her home with me. And that as soon as possible. The persuading her to that was delightful. The thoughts of convenience and personal advantage in the matter made her sensitive. "You will be marrying me because it is convenient for me—it may not be convenient for you." "Convenient!" There was but one answer to that. Our marriage at the earliest possible moment settled, how much of deepest possible interest and moment to ourselves did that give us to talk about? What was to be the form and furnishing of our home, the ordering of it? We went into delightful details.

And so the talk flowed on and on, with many a touch of tenderness or merriment in it: how often it led to tenderness, to passion, to declaration of love by word or deed! Then, with reference to that future, we discussed my hopes and wishes and ambitions in connection with my career.

What did we not talk about? We talked about books and music and songs. I told her about the folk-lore and superstition of the land, of which I had learnt much sitting by camp fires; and she told me about those of Ireland, her home was by its melancholy western main. We talked of our families, the families of which each was about to become a member.

Our talk was often merry and gay. There was her natural Irish gaiety and humour, and with her cheerfulness was also a principle. She would make light of dangers and difficulties, meet them with a smiling countenance. But the sense of fun was strong within her. There was her charming raillery. The June days were very long but they were not long enough for our talk.

Then came the nights, nights some of which would have become an everlasting memory by their own character, so splendid and gorgeous were they, the sky of an intense deep blue, the stars shining with a wondrous lustre, the moon with a rare effulgence, frosting the trees with silver. Our souls were lifted up within us. Our love thrilled about us as we sat silent; silent with emotion too deep for the brief fathom-line of thought or sense; eternal moments, moments of feelings that pass away but cannot die, folded in their own eternity. The hour was sacred. We talked of things high and holy, and divine.

The seven days swept by. On the night of the seventh we left. We ourselves had settled that we should make for Tulsipore or go down the river; our good host thought both those courses dangerous; he thought we had better proceed to the station of Rahun, situated on the River Ganges, to which he could ensure us safe conveyance. Though so opposed to all violence he kept a large body of armed retainers, both horse and foot. He could furnish us with a strong escort. The going to Rahun was the more acceptable to me because the chaplain there was my cousin, with whom I had stayed a short time before, in whose house I knew that not only I but my friends would find a resting-place, a hearty welcome; that they would find there with him and his wife what they so much needed, a home, comfort, friendship, soothing; as many a one in trouble had done before. The only question was about the hospitable house being already full. But that we should see.

And so once more out from the port of safety, on to the inimical open sea. But we had now smooth calm passage. We could not but have apprehensions that murdered sleep for all of us except Philip. Deeply did they trouble me, though I said nothing about them. Nor did they, though they too, more especially the mother, must have felt them.

But we made our voyage, our night journey, without incident. Here we are standing in front of the gate of my cousin's compound, our carriage and escort dismissed, according to the desire of the man in charge of us; there was no need for him to drive in, we had no luggage, and he seemed averse from doing so. Here we stand in a group.*

* The reader has observed, of course, that Major-General Hayman has, in this chapter, made use of certain expressions of Shelley's without giving quotation marks.—R. E. F.

CHAPTER XXX

IN AN ENGLISH HOME AGAIN

I FIND the gate locked, an unwonted circumstance, one indicative of the time. We call to the watchman: he unlocks it.

"Where is your master?" I ask, as we walk up toward the house with him.

"Asleep on the housetop," he replies. The house was a flat-roofed one.

In the front verandah a servant is laying the "little breakfast." At the end of this verandah were the stairs leading up to the lower level of the roof; it had two levels, the upper over the two main, central rooms, and the lower over the side rooms and verandahs surrounding them; as if you were to lay a small book on the top of a big one.

"I will go up and tell my cousin of our arrival," I say, as I hand my companions chairs.

"To think that we are in a bungalow again!" said Maud, as she sank down in hers. "Oh, thank God! Thank God!"

I mount the staircase. Against the side of the raised central block, right opposite the opening of the staircase, as if to guard it, stood the bedstead on which my reverend cousin lay. By the head of the bed stood a chair: on it a Bible, a candlestick, and a big cigar-case; against it leaned a rifle; over the back of it hung a sword; against the wall, near by, stood a fowling-piece. A dog had barked and rushed down the staircase on our entering the verandah, but had become quiet to my "Hye, Toby, old boy! Hye!" He knew me.

"Ugh! Augh! Ahem!" groaned and muttered the sleeper as I stepped on to the roof, and the bedstead creaked under

the weight of his burly frame as he turned over toward the wall. No doubt he had been disturbed by the barking of the dog; then the sudden silence had allowed the Lethe wave of the soothing early morning sleep to flow over him again.

"Septimus!" I say softly.

"Ugh! Augh!"

"Septimus!" somewhat louder.

"Septimus!" is echoed, faintly, from the upper terrace. I had never heard it before thus tremulous, but I knew it, the voice of my cousin's wife. Then she too was sleeping here: on the upper level, as more secure.

"Septimus!" I call again softly.

"Septimus! Oh, Septimus!" cries the voice above, tremulously, fearfully.

"What is it?" growls the sleeper.

"Do you know I thought I heard the voice of John Hayman crying out 'Septimus'?"

"What nonsense—disturbing a fellow—in his beauty sleep."

"I did."

"Dreaming."

"Septimus," I say more softly.

"There! Septimus, there! I heard it again."

"Zounds! so did I—or thought I did. We can't both be dreaming."

"You are not dreaming. It is I, I myself, John Hayman."

A faint shriek from above.

"Good Lord! What does it mean?" and the bed groans aloud as he rolls himself over.

"It is I myself—not my ghost."

He throws his short legs over the side of the bed and sits up.

"You yourself—Jack Hayman! Not a ghost?"

"No."

He jumps up. In his night garb of roorta and pyjamas he looks like a squat Pierrot. He draws back a little as he sees my form in the dim morning light.

"Flesh and blood?"

"*Such* (truly)," I say. "There," holding out my hand.

He takes it in his huge fist and gives it, after feeling it gently to make sure, a mighty squeeze.

"It is himself, Jack Hayman, Edie; Jack. I have got hold of him," and he gives my hand another vice-like grip.

"Take care; it's flesh and blood," I cry out.

"Ho! ho! ho! Jack Hayman," and he lets it go.

"We thought you were dead, Jack."

"I am not dead."

"'I'm not dead at all, said Jack Robinson,'" and he trolled out the refrain of a song then popular. "He is not dead, duck; not a bit of it. All alive and kicking, O!"

"I have just arrived," I say.

"Just arrived—where from? Above or below?"

"Neither—from the district," I say, laughing.

"Bringest thou with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell?"

"The former, I hope."

"What is it, mamma? Who is it, mamma?" cried a voice, whose plaintive thinness I knew too well, from above.

"Uncle Jack—you know—who was here a little while ago and gave you so many toys."

"And used to be my horse, like papa is my elephant?"

"Yes, darling."

"I am very glad he has come back."

"So are we, my dear—very glad. We thought he had gone away from us for ever."

Below resounds the bright gay note of chanticleer.

"Come down, Edie, come down at once. Come down as you are. Don't you hear the cock crow? He'll be vanishing—leaving nothing but a sulphurous st——, ahem! smell, behind him. He'll be off before you can say Jack Robinson."

She came down in her white dressing-gown, in which, with her pale face and slender form, she herself looked like a ghost; in which, with that sweet, pure beautiful face, and that slender graceful form, she looked angelical. She holds out the pretty hand, so soft in make and motion: she looks at me with her tender grey eyes, and with their welcoming gaze is mingled a look of awe. I had been dead, and was now alive again.

"Oh, thank God! I am so glad." We were great friends, my cousin's wife and I.

"I really thought it was your ghost when I heard your

voice," she goes on. "It made my heart stand still when I heard you calling 'Septimus.'"

"We thought you were dead, killed, murdered. We gave you up for lost. It is not right of him, my Buffalo"—he was in the habit of inventing the most inappropriate names for his wife—"is it? To come turning up like this? After all our sad mourning. Phew! Be off! Begone! Vanish! Disappear! Aroynt thee, witch!"

"Don't mind his nonsense, Jack," said Edith, in her soft sweet voice.

"I won't aroynt—I mean to stay; that is to say if you can take me in."

"My dear boy, of course," said Septimus. "But how did you escape? We did mourn you as dead. The seeing you again was the last thing we expected." There was a sudden touch of deep feeling in his voice: we were friends as well as relatives. "But how did you escape? We heard—circumstantially—that all the officers of your regiment were killed."

"I am afraid they were—all but myself—all those with it."

"But how did you escape? Why are you not dead? Where do you come from?"

"I will tell you all about that——"

"To be sure. You would like a wash, a drink, first."

"I have two ladies with me."

"Two ladies! Who?"

"Mrs. Alexander, and her sister-in-law, Miss Alexander."

"Miss Alexander!"

"You have heard me speak of her."

"To be sure—a good deal—somewhat to excess."

"Septimus!" said Edith, a warning "Septimus!"

"Let me see—what was her name? Jemima Ann or Ann Jemima?"

"You know very well, Septimus," said Edith. "Mary."

"To be sure. You spoke of her very often, frequently, somewhat at length. Irish girl. Those Irish eyes. Splendid smile. Sparkling countenance. Intellectual. Fine figure; looked so well on horseback. Beautiful hands, neat ankle, adorned with every grace and charm—something like that."

"Septimus!"—Edith.

"I am engaged to her," I say, bursting with the fact which I had so looked forward to communicating to them ever since it had been settled that we were to come here.

Edith held out her hand and looked her sweet congratulations.

"Congratulate you, my boy," said Septimus in his bull voice. "A good thing at a bad time. You said the two ladies were with you?"

"Yes—and Mrs. Alexander's boy."

"But where is Alexander?"

"Alexander—dead."

"Dead!"

"He was killed at Burkote—there was an outbreak there."

"Poor fellow! poor ladies! Wife and sister."

"A bad time indeed," said Edith sadly. "Every day some terrible news. Someone killed, someone dead, whole families swept away."

"We must not dwell on that," said Septimus quickly. "And joyful things happen too, such as this of Jack turning up again—like a bad penny."

"Oh yes," and she turned upon me her gentle grey eyes in which a gleam of joy dispels for the moment the shadow of anxiety and sorrow which I had remarked as resting upon them. "I am so glad to see your face again."

"His ugly phiz. 'Tis a good game though, 'Jack's alive.'"

"Can you take us all in?"

"Oh yes," says Edith.

"My dear boy, of course," says Septimus.

"The whole of us—all four?"

"Of course—of course. Why, we put up twice that number for the Sky Meeting. Most of them dead now—killed. I won the Oaks—sold the mare—good price. Put you all up—of course. But where are the ladies?"

"Down below in the verandah."

"Dear me, and we have been keeping them waiting. But ghost-seeing is unusual and distracting. Ghost scene from *Hamlet* in real life. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! I assure you I felt like that when I heard your voice—Septimus—Septimus. I suppose that's what made me remember the other line—airs from heaven, blasts from hell.

Go down, Jack. If you will now retire from this our tyring place, Blackamoor and I will throw on our duds and come down after you. 'Go on, I'll follow thee,' as Hamlet said to the ghost. Howl, ghost, for more tea and toast."

I go downstairs and give the order. The prospect of them was delightful.

Septimus and Edith come hurrying down after me. Edith welcomes them with that soft, pitying tenderness, that sweet, gentle, kindly manner which had been as balm to many a young subaltern sick of his first fever, of his loneliness, his exile, his first parting from home, whom she and her husband had taken into the house to nurse through his convalescence; to many an older man ill of disappointment, of badly spent years, who had gone away set again on his legs, moral and physical, by her sweet, sisterly kindness, her goodness, her piety, as also by the honest, manly brotherhood and bluff admonition of her husband, 'the sporting chaplain.' For as such was my cousin known. And he was very fond of sport, could handle well both rod and gun, and in England had handled well oar and cricket-bat as well; a great lover of dogs and horses, those admirable animals.

Edith fixes her soft grey eyes upon my friends, and their hands meet, and they are friends.

"You must stay with us," she says. "We have plenty of room, and my little girl will be delighted to have a companion."

"Lots of room—small family, big house," says Septimus, as he rolls from one lady to the other. "Any amount of room. Don't like empty rooms: like 'em filled. And how are you, my little man?"

"Quite well, sir, thank you."

"That's right. Name?"

"Philip."

"Delighted to have you in the house, Philip. Another child. It will be nuts for Elsie. You must have some jam. Here, Ghasican"—so did he pronounce the name of his major-domo, Ghazi Khan; he had a way of his own with the Indian names and words, but has not the noble-sounding Budr-ud-din-Hosain of the *Arabian Nights* become poor Bed-ridden-Hassan in our version?—"bring some English

jam—strawberry—that's what little boys, and girls too, like. And some more bread."

"You are most welcome in every way," he goes on, turning to the ladies after settling the boy in a chair. "Welcome, anyhow, but not least so from what Jack has told us, Miss Alexander. Told us already—was bursting with it. And I don't wonder now that I have seen you." It was said that my cousin had a great eye for pretty women. "Lucky dog! Down, Belle"—this to one of the many dogs about us now. "But I do not know what you can see in him to like. You told me, Jack, when you were here before, only two months ago—and all that has happened since then, but never mind that—that you had got a complete rig out when your regiment was near Calcutta."

"So I did."

"This is not one of the suits you got then?"

"No," said I, laughing.

"Rum cut."

"Country made."

"Evidently—and wants washing."

"Badly."

"I suppose you travel light—not much luggage?"

"None; not even a tooth-brush, though I have this sword and pistol."

"A most buccaneering sort of get up. Do well for the stage. I suppose you ladies have not much luggage either?"

That was really what he was leading up to.

"No. We have nothing but the clothes on our backs," said Maud. "We lost——"

"Then the first thing you all want is *kupra* (clothing)," said Septimus quickly. He did not wish her to recall her great loss. "You three ladies are much of a height, and I suppose Edith can let you have something for to-day. Elsie's clothes will not do for the boy, but I can get him a suit from Captain Bell; he lives near, and has a boy his age. I'll fetch it. And then about you, Jack. I am afraid my clothes won't do for you. You could get into them easily enough—only too easily. You would not look well in Miss Alexander's eyes in my trousers. A world too wide for your shrunk shanks. I am so much broader in the beam. But

I think a suit of Tom Jackson's would do for you near enough. He has not Jack's Apollo-Belvedere-like figure, Miss Alexander; a mere ordinary man, but they will do for you, and him, for a day or two. I'll bring you a suit of his, Jack. He and his wife will be very glad to hear that Jack's alive. They had thought the flame extinguished: that you'd gone out."

"I could go and get it myself," I said.

"I have to go out," says Septimus, "and I think you and the ladies had better go to bed and have a good long sleep. You look as if you wanted it."

We did: they had had none: I very little.

"Make a good meal now"—we were doing so; how delicious the toast, divine the tea!—"and do not get up until tiffen time. After that you ladies might go out with Edith to our milliner. We have one. Shall I order up any of the cloth-men? tailors?"

"I have first to send in my papers—about my poor husband's death. We are penniless: have not a pice between us," said Maud. That was a form of suffering many a poor lady had to endure at that time: to-day in a home in affluence, to-morrow a penniless wanderer.

"Yes, yes, you will have to send in your papers, of course. But that we will leave for a day or two, the more especially as there is no post running just at present."

"No post running!" I exclaimed.

"Not been for the past fortnight. The mail-cart is not running, and yet the majestic car of English rule—but we'll let that stand for the present. As there is no post running I have a lot of money in the house, a great deal more than I like to have—have not been able to send it away. So you ladies, and you, Jack, must hold me as your banker, and we'll settle accounts afterwards. And please draw freely. I really should like to get rid of it. And now I must be off."

They have brought up to the door his steed Bucephalus, a very powerful country-bred horse. My cousin's Friar-Tuck-like figure was not the best adapted for horseback, but he was a good rider, having ridden from his childhood up.

"Tell them to let go Beauty and Black Prince," he calls out to a servant, and the two beautiful, large, powerful grey-

hounds, with which he has won so many a coursing match, come skimming up like birds on wing, and he is off with thundering hoof, with his extraordinary, extinguisher-like helmet on his head.

We form a cheerful, even merry, party at lunch. It was always cheerful and merry where Septimus was. It was delightful, also elevating, to find oneself in clean clothes and in an English house again; to have before one an English-laid table. And how my soul thrilled as we knelt down—Mary and I side by side—and joined in the family prayers, which Septimus had purposely postponed—joined in his brief, fervent thanksgiving for our deliverance.

We had much laughing at our appearance in other peoples' garments.

"Why, those are not your clothes, Edie, that Miss Alexander has on?" said Septimus in a simulated surprise.

"Oh yes."

"How much better they look! Quite beautiful!"

Truly Mary had a figure that would set off any garment, and the clouds of apprehension rolled away, her beauty shone out in full effulgence. About her was the bloom and lustre of youth: the full sparkle in her eye: the rose bloom not yet faded from her cheek. Edith Pigott had a graceful form and a sweet, lovely face, but upon her was the droop and palor, if also the etherealness, of weak health and a constant anxiety on account of her delicate child, the withering influence of the clime. But she knew that her husband meant no comparison. She knew that in his eyes her beauty was supreme. Men sometimes wondered why she, so beautiful, should have married a man whose representative in a gallery of statues of the ancient gods would most certainly not have been Apollo, rather Vulcan. It was the compelling force of his love. And then he looked every inch the gentleman: was a man of good birth and education: an "honest" man, a man of a deep and genuine, if not of a sanctimonious, piety. If in the big military stations Septimus was great in the mess-room, he was also great in the hospital.

"I am sorry I cannot offer you ladies a glass of wine, or you a glass of beer, Jack. We have drunk the whole place out. In the mess they are quite out of wine and cigars:

there is no bouse nor no tobacco. I have nothing but champagne left now. By the way, I can offer you champagne."

The ladies decline; so do I.

"Not at this hour," I say.

"Then we'll have some at dinner, in honour of your arrival —your resurrection. Here, Ghasican, two bottles of Simkin for dinner, and see that they are *tunder* (so did he pronounce the word *thunda* (cold)). "Let me give you half this teal, Miss Alexander. I have some wild duck and teal still left, Jack—the wind is tempered. This is a horrid time for mutton —kill in the morning, eat at night. Fat mutton, and a good glass of port, an English fire, and a good-looking English girl to wait on you: please God, we'll have them again one day, Jack, when we remove from these tents of unrighteousness. And now I must go and see if the children have all they want."

His weak little girl was his constant care. He comes back from the adjoining room with her in his arms. She had inherited the beauty of her mother, but not the strength of her father. She was very frail and delicate-looking: was indeed so frail and delicate that she could not walk much: her hold on life seemed very slight: on her sweet face a disembodied look.

"She was just coming in here."

"Want some bread for little boy," she says, in her thin, plaintive voice.

"Where is the *khitmutgar?*" asks her mother.

"Not there; gone away," says the child.

"He ought not to have," says Septimus, looking at his wife.

This indicated a new indifference to his work on the part of the servant significant of the time.

"Have you made the acquaintance of my little girl yet, Mrs. Alexander?"

"Oh yes," said Maud, smiling up at the child softly and tenderly.

Made her acquaintance and knew more about her than he did. The two mothers had been together with their children, and Maud knew that the mother knew that the child would not be with her for long.

"How very white the children are at this season of the year, Mrs. Alexander," said Septimus, looking down, very tenderly, on the lily-white face that lay against his massive chest. "But Elsie is to go to England this winter with her mother, and there she will get roses on her cheeks—won't you, my darling? And now we will take the bread in for the little boy."

He carried her back again. He was always taking her up, and holding or carrying her in his arms, not only for the satisfaction of his love, to save her from the, to her, great exertion of walking, but because he could not bear the emotion which her feebler movements awakened in him. Under his rough look and speech and ways lay a deep tenderness, like the sweet water in the rough, rugged rock. My dear cousin Septimus.

CHAPTER XXXI

UNDER ARREST

IMMEDIATELY after lunch I went to report myself to Colonel Verelst. He commanded the Native Infantry Regiment quartered here, and the station also: was the supreme military authority. I had an experience more surprising and unexpected than any I had gone through yet. Those were incidental to the time, to be looked for at a period of universal revolt and lawlessness, of attack upon us English. I went jubilant, for I had been through the enemy's country, had information that might be of value to communicate. I came back downcast, in the situation in which a military man most dreads to find himself. Colonel Verelst was acquainted with me; I had dined often at the mess when I had been staying here with my cousin a short time before; I expected to be congratulated on my escape, to give my information, to be attached to the regiment. "Was I away from my regiment on leave?" "The regiment had mutinied—I was obliged to fly for my life—I was with the detachment——" "You must reserve your explanations for your trial." "My trial!" "By Court Martial. I will report the circumstance of your having come here without leave to the General commanding the Division; he will order the Court to assemble; in the meanwhile you will consider yourself under arrest." "But, sir——" "That is all, sir. You may go," he exclaimed peremptorily, his hard woodeny face—on which nose and mouth were represented by straight lines—becoming more hard and woodeny than ever.

Though I was impatient to return home and communicate this sudden change in my condition to the new-found sharer of my joys and sorrows, I thought it as well to devote some of

my present moments of liberty to providing myself with some of the necessaries of which I stood in need, so I drove to the "Europe Shop" of old Eduljee, the Parsee merchant. I found the strange-hatted old fire-worshipper as bland and calm as ever; the war of races did not matter to him, he belonged to a race apart. I determined also to go and see Tom Jackson, the Tom Jackson from whom Septimus had got the suit of clothes I now had on; he was in the regiment, had just married a connection of mine—we were mostly connected with one another in India in those days. I wished to speak to him about what had just happened. I startled them—him and his wife. It was not by appearing suddenly before them as one returned from the dead: Septimus had told them of my "turning up." But the servant asked me to go into the drawing-room and he would inform them I was here; they were in their own rooms, he said. I walked across the dining-room, and on quietly separating the high hanging curtains that divided it from the drawing-room I saw before me, as it were, a group in statuary. They were both standing on the rug in front of the mantelpiece at the opposite side of the room. Their faces were turned toward me; but they saw me not. They were standing close together, she leaning against him, his right arm round her waist, her right hand on his shoulder, he clasping the wrist with his left hand, he looking down on her, she looking up at him; they had been married three months, they were absorbed in that look. They were still as any statue group; with the stillness of the warm live body, deeper than that of the cold dead stone. I gave a gentle "Ahem!" and they sprang asunder.

Then came warm congratulations, eager inquiries. I give a rapid short account of all that had happened to me before getting here, being anxious to arrive at what had happened after. When I have mentioned that I say—

"How can I get the Colonel to rescind his order? It is absurd. I do not like being under arrest. He could make better use of me by attaching me to the regiment. I suppose you are shorthanded, have plenty of fellows away on leave, as the outbreak was unexpected?"

"Yes; but nothing on earth would make the Colonel go back on an order. And in connection with the mutiny of

a sepoy regiment he is simply mad. We dare not whisper—dream—the shadow of the shade of a possibility of such a thing happening in our own. We must not allow the possibility until we are dead, until our men have killed us. That's his view."

When I get back to my cousin's I find Mary alone in the drawing-room.

"What do you think has happened? I have been placed under arrest."

"Placed under arrest! What for? I am sure you could have done nothing to deserve it."

Delightful this warm faith.

"For being away from my regiment without leave. Colonel Verelst seems to hold that I should have remained with my men——"

"But you did."

"To the last moment possible."

"As you would."

"But he holds apparently that I should have remained and got killed."

"Needlessly—uselessly?"

"Under all circumstances whatsoever."

"That would be mere folly."

"I ran from the men of the cavalry. I ran at the edge of the sword."

"How shameful of him! How disgraceful! As if you had done something dishonourable. As if you could."

Her flaming looks were compensation.

"A-a-hem!" A mock, elaborate cough of warning from my cousin, who has entered the room. "Did not know you were back, Jack. These Indian rooms with half a dozen open doorways not so nice for engaged couples as a room in an English house with one door at which you must knock—at all events, turn the handle."

"Oh, Mr. Pigott, what do you think? Jack has been placed under arrest."

"Under arrest! What for? Treason against the sepoy?"

"For being absent without leave."

"You had to take French leave. Did you not tell Verelst that—explain?"

"He would listen to no explanation. Said I must reserve that for the trial. He would report my having come here, without leave, to the General commanding the Division: the General would order a Court to assemble: when I appeared before that I could place any explanation I wished to offer before it: in the meantime I am to hold myself under arrest."

"Wonderful man, when the General is shut up in a fort, and has no Division to command, and there are no posts running. It is all a part of his policy of 'Don't believe.'"

"It is not pleasant to find oneself under arrest and awaiting trial. But what troubles me is that it will prevent me from seeing service, from taking part in any movement, if the regiment is ordered out. I am now a prisoner in the house: cannot leave it without breaking my arrest——"

"My dear boy! Of course you'll break it. A mere farce, though it is part of a tragedy."

"To find myself attached to nothing, unable to do anything, confined to the house——"

"You will find consolations, Jack. These grounds are large, and if you cannot leave them, you can wander about in them, sit in the garden. And if Miss Alexander will walk about with the poor prisoner, sit with him, he will find it bearable. I should. Nice arbour in garden, Miss Alexander, seat for two—much in request at our moonlight parties. Rather amusing having a prisoner in the house. Never had one before. You won't be able to go to the band this evening, Jack, but we can hear the music from here, and we'll sit outside and listen to it."

And so in the evening the chairs were placed on the masonry platform in the middle of the flower garden before the house, and we sat there and listened to the band, which played in the middle of an open plain just beyond my cousin's house. It was, of course, curious for the time, the band of the Native Regiment. We watched the people driving and riding to it along the road which ran by the compound. The concourse did not seem to me so large, the clatter of hoofs and roll of wheels so continuous, as when I had been here some six weeks before. I say so to Septimus.

"Of course not, my boy. We have not a third of the

people here now, not a third of those that were here when you came to us in April."

"What has become of them?"

"There has been an evacuation—a withdrawal—an exodus: but I will tell you about that afterwards. Queer: our chief civil and military authorities going by in a row."

And it was so. Colonel Verelst rode by on his charger, stiff and upright. The Commissioner, the chief civil functionary, went by in his big barouche, with its splendid horses, its portly pompous coachman, its trim running grooms. Mr. Dalzell, the Collector, the local ruler, the supreme executive officer, went by in more royal state, in as splendid a vehicle, with a finer pair of horses, and even more magnificent coachman, who bore on the front of his huge turban the Dalzell arms in silver, while the syces, or grooms, carried even finer silver-handled whisks, while two mounted orderlies rode behind the carriage.

"And as you cannot go to see the fellows the fellows are coming to see you," said Septimus. And, indeed, soon the platform on which we sat was crowded with friends and acquaintances who had come to see me and congratulate me as one risen from the dead. Maud Alexander and Mary, too, were soon the centre of a kindly crowd, congratulating them, making offers of help of every kind, with the ladies it mostly took the direction of clothing.

At dinner we had the promised champagne, and it was a very merry meal. Septimus was most hilarious; he kept us in a roar: how his own jolly laughter rolled out, how much chaff about the poor prisoner and his consolations!

Then the ladies retired to the aerial open bedroom, to which the children had gone up already. There was a new sleeping arrangement. All the ladies and the children were to sleep on the housetop. Septimus and I were to have our bedsteads placed in the verandah below, at the foot of the staircase.

"Let us sit outside and smoke another cigar," said Septimus.

CHAPTER XXXII

A CRITICAL SITUATION

WE went out and sat again on the circular masonry platform in the centre of the flower garden.

My cousin's talk was serious enough now.

"You consider the condition of things here critical?"

"Most critical: the more so that the men in authority refuse to allow that it is so."

"The men in authority——"

"On the Military side, Verelst: on the Civil, McEwan, the Commissioner, and Dalzell, the Collector."

"They see nothing dangerous in the situation here?"

"No, the old asses, the old pragmatical fools. They do not, or will not. Have refused to do so all along. I have been to them all regarding it, and only got snubbed for my pains: went at once when our power and authority broke down all about us in this extraordinary way. They refused to do anything, or allow anything to be done. They had taken up the 'do nothing' policy. Keep quiet, present an unruffled countenance, preserve a lordly inactivity, a majestical calm—or whatever the d——, yes, I will say it, the damned words are."

"There is a certain loftiness——"

"Curse the loftiness. There is no loftiness in endangering the lives of other people. Do not lose your head, of course. Face the situation calmly. But do you face a thing better with your eyes open or with them shut? Do you ward off danger better by preparing against it or by ignoring it?"

"There is danger?"

"Under the present conditions there is danger in every English station in these parts. There are special sources of danger here. We are immediately on the borders of Oudh;

it lies across the river. And Rohilkund is not far off. We are in the thick of the Mahomedan population. Most of the great landowners in our neighbourhood are Mahomedans. We have here a Mahomedan Nuwâb whose father held independent sway here, a fact that these three gentlemen seem to forget; but the Nuwâb does not, nor do the people. The Fort, which we now use as a Factory and Magazine, was their fortress. There are many villages inhabited by hereditary thieves and robbers near. The city is a turbulent Mahomedan one. These are special sources of danger. Then there is the Jail, the ruffians of which would be let loose: there are the ruffians of the Cantonment Bazaar, a precious good muck-heap to breed them in! Then there is the Regiment——"

"If that keeps staunch the other things would not matter."

"I do not know. The Nuwâb has a considerable force of Infantry, Cavalry, Guns. He could easily augment it; the Mahomedan landlords would join with him, the predatory tribes flock to his standard. And there is everything to induce, to tempt, to force the sepoys to join in the movement against us; the feelings connected with religion and caste, the strongest they have; the sense of military brotherhood; the fear of isolation—their patriotism——"

"Have they that?"

"Call it race feeling then."

"It is a good regiment."

"So was yours. Give me a light.

"Then," he goes on, "they, the sepoys, feel more than others the great temptation. It is right under their noses."

"The great temptation?"

"Of the Government Treasury—a very full one here. The sepoys themselves furnish the guards for this Treasury, the emptying of which would make each man of them independent for life. 'There *may be* no disturbance,' I said to them. 'Delhi *may be* retaken soon and things fall back into their old condition——'

"They would do so, and it ought to be retaken soon.

"Quite so. 'But,' as I went on to say to them, 'the outbreak *might come* at any moment, might come one day and the fall of Delhi follow the next and be of no use to us. We ought to be prepared for its coming, whether it come or not.

The being prepared for an outbreak might ward it off, just as the not being prepared might bring it on. And we could prepare against it so well; we have everything to our hand. There is the Fort, now the Accoutrement Factory. Put it into defensive condition again. Mount guns on the walls. Provision it. Have it ready as a place of refuge. Remove the sepoy guard and replace it by an English one——"

"There are no English soldiers here," I said.

"No, but there are the English non-commissioned officers employed in the Factory—a number of others living here on their pensions—any number of civilians. Why, I had then on my list of those capable of bearing arms, taking in all, Europeans and Eurasians, men and lads, nearly a hundred names. You know that there is quite a large colony of pensioned Government servants, civil and military—chiefly military—here; also a great number of private people, merchants, traders, contractors, indigo planters, so that we had with those in active Government employ quite a large community then."

"Then—then—then——"

"We have had an evacuation—a withdrawal—an exodus. I will come to that hereafter. With those hundred men, a great many of them trained soldiers, most of them accustomed to the use of firearms, we could have held the Fort, which is not only a Factory but a military Magazine, with a large stock of arms and ammunition, for a long time, certainly until Delhi fell, or the river rose and we could get down it safely to Kunhiapur."

"Cannot you get down to it now?"

"Yes, but not so safely, quickly, certainly. The river is at its lowest. Progress along it slow. Constant difficulty from shoals and sandbanks. Danger from not being able to keep far away from the banks, having to pass close under them, the enemy, it may be, following us along them and firing down on us; danger from having to pass immediately below the forts and fortified villages along the banks. With a fuller river everything the reverse. Command of the situation then. Quite different matter."

"They would not agree to your proposal?"

"No, would not listen to it—not one of them. I go to Verelst. He is furious. Remove the sepoy guard! impugn

the honour of his regiment! display a want of confidence in the loyalty of his men! he is ready to stake his life upon their loyalty; will not have them driven into disaffection by distrust."

"That has happened, and is there not something lofty in his staking his life upon the staunchness of his men?"

"There is such a thing as a blind trust. And let him stake his own life, but not that of my wife and child, not to mention my own. He has no wife or child. I go to Dalzell. Plenty of your loftiness. All loftiness there—personal loftiness. His nose is so high up in the air that he can see nothing about him; proud as a peacock and as brainless. His one active faculty the sense of his own importance. What had I to do in the matter? He was in charge of this district, this district of Rahun, and could maintain order and quiet in it with his own Police Force. I am Robert Dalzell, let no dog bark. I go to McEwan, the Commissioner, the man in chief authority here. I beg him to exercise that authority. I say to him what I have said to you just now. I point out to him what a terrible thing it would be if an outbreak did come upon us unprepared, the whole community living quietly scattered about in their separate thatched-roof bungalows—no combined plan of action—the place full of women and children—each man left to shift for himself—the danger—the madness—the iniquity. He sees no occasion to exercise that authority; he quite approves of the attitude of Colonel Verelst and Mr. Dalzell, their mode of action—'Inaction,' I say. 'The inaction of a lofty confidence,' he says, in his pompous, didactic way; he has been a great writer of reports, has made his way by the turning of sentences, 'of a proud consciousness of strength, of a calm, unruffled composure. Let us exhibit no disquiet; by doing so we may only provoke, precipitate the danger. I would have no disturbance of the ordinary machinery of government,' he says. 'Let the car of English rule in India move on majestically in its course, crushing down disaffection by the ordinary rotation of its wheels.'

"The car of English rule move on majestically when its wheels are off! But I won't go into that comparison; I am sick of it. Good God! that the lives of men and women should hang on a simile! And all this talk about not disturbing

the ordinary aspect of things, presenting a calm unruffled front, when most of the people had got boats ready for flight! when among these was the official next in rank below McEwan, many of the officers of the regiment, all the married officers. Verelst was furious about that; but he could not prevent it. You know that the Civil Lines here extend all along the river bank, that most of the merchants and traders have their houses actually on it, so the idea came natural. The men said that with no settled, combined, official measures for self-defence, with no place of refuge and defence prepared, they must provide means of escape for themselves and their families; the boats are at hand. I go to McEwan again. This was not an exhibition of calm reliance on the protecting power of our rule, I point out: and it was no private thing: it was open, palpable, patent. Which would display the most calmness and composure and be most likely to keep things steady, increase our own confidence and diminish that of the enemy, preparations for flight or preparations for fight? Everywhere it is the forward and not the backward look that wins. Take possession of the Fort, arm it, victual it, have the boats moored under it, everyone to make for it in case of danger; then we should rest in calm confidence. But all no good. He quite agreed with Colonel Verelst that nothing must be done that displayed a want of trust in his men, cast a slur upon their loyalty. Orts, orts! The majestic car of English rule—he could not overrule Mr. Dalzell, the immediately responsible officer, interfere with him in the management of the district of which he was the head. McEwan is the man of rules and regulations, the man for times of order and not of disorder. And one might feel sorry for him, a man placed after a long and honourable service in a position to which he is not equal. One might think it mad and foolish, but one might have a certain respect for a man who took up that position of calm, undisturbed composure. But that is not really what prevents him from exercising his superior authority, overruling Dalzell. Now comes the strange, the inconceivable, the miserable, the damnable real reason."

"What is it?" I ask, startled.

"That Dalzell is the Honourable Robert Dalzell."

"What on earth has that to do with it?"

"With Mr. McEwan everything. Impossible though it may seem, you know that the Scotch have a greater reverence for aristocratic rank than the English, as shown in the case of so illustrious a man as Walter Scott even. McEwan, son of a small farmer: uncle made large fortune in London: became Chairman of Board of Directors:* put McEwan and two brothers into Service: great rise for them. And so, helped by the exercise of his own excellent qualities and talents, McEwan has become one among the rulers of men. Therefore doth he walk and move with the lordly air which has gained him the sobriquet of the Honourable Angus. But here, in this place, the fictitious honourable is subdued by the real honourable. The official pride pales before the family pride. And Dalzell carries that family pride to the utmost height. His family is one of the oldest of the titled families of Scotland. That is to Dalzell the one fact in the universe. It causes him to look down with immeasurable contempt on all the people here, even those in the Service, they are to him detestable middle-class people, and as for all the rest they are mere *canaille*. I believe I am one of the few people here to whom he allows an existence. He has more sympathy with the Nuwâb and the great Mahomedan landowners than with his own countrymen; and that governs his policy. To McEwan the social superiority is absolutely subduing; he gives way before it. His official status is subdued by the other's social status, to our detriment, to our imminent peril. I do not think he really does believe in Dalzell's attitude; his aloofness from his countrymen; his looking for support from the Nuwâb; his firm faith in the power—under his own guidance—of his Police Force, composed mainly of Mahomedans. He is too clear-sighted a man for that. Of the two he is the man of superior intelligence, as he is also the man of finer feeling, of a more delicate sensibility, for which reason, too, he cannot stand up against Dalzell's brainless force, his overbearing arrogance, his rude haughtiness of speech and manner.

"And so I come to the exodus. One morning about a week ago arose a false rumour of an outbreak. The sepoys had mutinied, the Nuwâb's forces were marching on the station,

* Of the East India Company.—R. E. F.

the jail-birds been let loose. There was a blind panic. The people rushed down to the boats. They got off at once—because no one opposed. They were fleeing when no man pursued. Two-thirds of our community disappeared. They went away down the river. Some of them, six or seven, thought it better to take shelter with a Hindoo zemindar at whose fortress their boat had put to. Of these several, two military men among them, came back here on finding that the alarm had been a false one; but the high civil functionary who was one of the number did not. I do not blame him, considering that no measures were taken for our protection here and that he has a wife and children, truly they are hostages to fortune at such a time as this. I only mention the fact because his absence has made a most palpable breach in the existing order, a most visible rent in the official hierarchy. One out of the three chief offices is closed. And yet our three wise men of Gotham insist that everything is as it used to was, and will do nothing but maintain the attitude of calm. And so here we are now with all the old dangers threatening us, the situation made more critical, and we left with about thirty-one or thirty-two fighting men, all told."

CHAPTER XXXIII

DAYS OF GREAT EMOTION

THE next day I had many visitors. As said before, there attached to me the interest of one risen from the dead. They were eager to hear of my adventures; to know how such a regiment as mine—Lindsay's—had come to mutiny. They had a strong concern in learning about the state of the country in which I had sojourned. It was only the men in supreme authority, civil and military, who did not seem to care to do so, lapped in their false security.

Three days went by. Three days memorable—unforgettable. Three days of this unforeseen situation. Three days of the enjoyment of home, of domestic life. Three days of the bliss of love. We wandered about, my beloved and I, in the tree-filled grounds and in the garden, in the cool hours of the morning and the cool hours of the evening. We sat in the deep silence and dim light of the drawing-room during the long afternoon hours, the two mothers and their children in their own rooms, Septimus in his study, their preoccupation drawing us the closer together, the room becoming to us a sanctuary, its dim light religious, in its profound silence the beating of our own hearts, as we sat close together in an ecstasy, the only sound we heard. For in their felt danger they were days of great intensity of feeling, of deep emotion. In the days of that enchanted week at Dharmnagar there had been strong emotion, deep feeling—the thrilling bliss of first love. But the emotions had not been made more intense by the circumstances of the hour, the play of other emotions. There had been there the lulling quiet of complete security. Here was the exercitation of danger. Here was keen apprehension. All who came to see me, men in the Service or out of it,

military man, young civilian, indigo planter, all were of the one opinion, an outbreak might take place here at any moment. It is in the moments of great peril that the emotions are sublimed. We know to what a height in the case of a shipwreck the feelings, good and bad—courage, cowardice, self-sacrifice, selfishness, magnanimity, meanness, calmness, frenzy—may rise. We had that surging of feeling here. Our vessel was driving on to the rocks. In this strong tension of the nerves was made greater what I had thought incapable of augmentation, the thrill of the clasp of the hand, the embrace, the kiss: was made more mighty what I had thought could not be made more powerful, the desire for the touch of the hand, the embrace, the kiss. Her looks were coy, but not so coy as they had been at Dharmnagar. There sometimes I had read in the laughing orbs the expression, "Oh, stupid man, to make so much of looking into a woman's eyes." I had observed in them looks of protestation at the strength of the expression in mine—looks of playful mockery at my grave, solemn, intense gaze. Then there had been the shy, veiling look. But now the stronger tide of emotion swept these lighter feelings away. There was a new depth and solemnity and sanctity in our relationship. The embrace, the kiss were sacramental, holy. The feelings rose to utmost height, to heaven. We know the keenness of emotion in the presence of death—who, alas! has not stood in the death-chamber? The solemn and majestic influence of death was about us. His dark wings hovered over the place. I had been here on a visit but a few weeks before. How changed the looks of the English people! Very loving and tender had been the looks of Septimus and his wife at one another, at the child, then: what a might of tenderness in them now! More brightly, but not so intensely, as yesterday would then have showed the love-look on the faces of Tom Jackson and his new-made wife. So with us two: minor feelings were swept away: the ordinary restraining influences disappeared. Our very souls, our immortal spirits, stood face to face. Her eyes were allowed to rest on mine: her hand allowed to return the clasp of mine: her lips not restrained from a responsive pressure.

In the evenings when the others went out for the refreshing

drives we wandered about the grounds or in the garden, and as the stars began to shine out mounted up to the top of the house and were lifted above the world.

Those three days went by in the quietude of a poise: the strain of uncertainty: the tension of suspense. The avalanche impended. Our fate hung trembling in the balance. Will Delhi fall soon or not? To repeat, they were days of great tension of feeling—of high-wrought emotion. You exchanged the ordinary greetings in a new way, looked on the well-loved faces, ate, drank, and slept in a new way. When we lay down to sleep we thought how will the night pass, and when we rose up in the morning we thought how will the day pass. We prayed with a new feeling.

On the fourth day came more active danger. It arose from the appearance in the neighbourhood of a mutinied regiment from Oudh. There arose here the same question as at Afzalnagar: Will the mutineers come here or go on to Delhi? "They will come here," said Septimus' indigo-planter friends to him. "They have been invited by the sepoys and the Nuwâb." Septimus goes to Colonel Verelst. "Invited by my men!" says Verelst in a fury. "Who dares make such an assertion?" He goes to Dalzell. "They are on their way to Delhi. My police have full information of their movements. Who dares to impugn the loyalty of the Nuwâb, a man of old noble family?" says Dalzell. To Mr. McEwan. "From the trustworthy sources of information at his command Mr. Dalzell is convinced that the mutinied regiment is not coming here, but will proceed on its way to Delhi," he says. "But we will get ready for a run," says Septimus to me.

"You will go down to the boats?"

"No. It was natural for those living near the bank of the river to make for them. They were close at hand, would get them out of the place at once—the great point. They are at a distance from us here. We might not be able to reach them. We must get out of the station as quickly as possible in case of a disturbance—remove from it promptly. I shall strike inland, make for Akbarābad."

"It is fifty miles off."

"Yes, but with a metalled road the whole way. My horses

are good. We should drive hard the first hour—get ten or twelve miles away—then go quietly on. We will put my wife and the two children into the carriage, I driving; you and the other two ladies would go in the dog-cart. I should not take any of the grooms, only Cheetoo the shikaree. He would help us in case we have to take a shot or two at any fellows on the road. He can shoot, and would stick by me to the last—we have stood together in some tough places before. Can turn his hand to anything. He would go with you in the dog-cart—the carriage heavier. We will take all my guns—keep them ready loaded. We cannot take much else; must move light; but we must take everything Elsie may want, and I will bring over the Communion plate. But we will pack everything we may determine to take with us at once, and have it ready. To get off sharp, that is the point; have everything ready. But we will do it all ourselves, quietly—put the things ready in my own room."

"You would not tell the ladies?"

"Oh yes. They are not of the flustering sort. But we will not talk about it to other people."

In the course of the day, when we had the house entirely to ourselves, when the servants were all away in their own houses at the far end of the compound, we made up all the packages, and placed them ready in the room.

As Mary and I stood on the topmost roof of the house that evening, a little after the sun had sunk, the landscape, no longer dark with excessive light, lay before us, clear and distinct, like a spread-out map. Immediately beneath and around us was the Military Cantonment, its salient points the green Parade Ground, the Sepoy Lines, the Cantonment Bazaar, the tall-steepled Church. Toward the river, northward, spreads the tree-filled Civil Lines, its salient points the large, square Court Houses, the Jail, the Racquet Court, the Post Office. Beyond that the wide, shallow valley of the Ganges, from the temples along whose hither bank comes the sound of the tinkling of the gongs, the bellowing of the sacred conch shell. There, higher up the river, about a mile and a half above us, to the left, the westward, stands, on the river, the native town, called by the Mussulmans Fattehabād, the Place of Victory, but known more commonly by its original Hindoo name of Rahun,

just as, even at the imperial capitals, the old Delhi and Agra have held their own against Shahjehanabād and Akbarābad, its position marked by the slender, lofty minarets of the mosque. And there, lower down the river, about a mile below us, to the eastward, to our right, immediately on the river bank, show the low walls and the circular bastions of the old Fort of Rahun.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RUSH

THE next morning the ladies had not yet descended from the summit where they slept. But Septimus and I were up. Our bedsteads had given place to the table for the little breakfast, and we are seated at it. "Someone riding hard," says Septimus, his mouth full of toast.

A horseman dashes up the avenue. It is Tom Jackson, in full uniform.

"The regiment has mutinied!" he shouts.

"Then I must go down to the Lines with you," I cry, leaping up. "Which horse, Septimus?"

"I have come from the Lines," cried Jackson. "The men have mutinied. The Colonel is killed. Some of the others. We had to run for our lives."

His horse was dripping with sweat.

"We must get off at once," says Septimus. "I make for Akbarābad, Jackson. Driving. You had better come with us."

"You cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Road occupied by that other regiment: the one supposed to be on its way to Delhi. Came in here this morning. Our fellows joined it at once. Preconcerted affair."

"Then we must make for the boats. Don't like going down the river; but if we must, we must."

"Cannot do that. Nuwâb's troops marched into station—to the Treasury. Planned affair all round. Must make for Fort. No time to lose. I'll fetch my wife," and he dashed away.

"I'll let them know," and Septimus leaped up the stairs. Down again giving his orders. The carriage, the dog-cart,

and the garden-cart to be brought up to the house at once. The things to be put into them to be got ready at once. Clamour and confusion among the servants; a rushing about; wild inquiries.

"Shall I take the big table lamp?" asks the bearer.

"No."

"Shall I put the garden tools, and the roller, into the cart?" bawls the gardener, in his out-of-door voice.

"No, you fool!"

"What about the goats, sir?" cries the goat-boy.

That was to turn out not a foolish, but a most useful inquiry.

"Bring them up here. Conduct them with the cart into the Fort," says Septimus.

And he soon reduces the vociferation and rush to quiet questioning, orderly activity. His orders are decisive and precise. His constant going out on shooting expeditions made his servants accustomed to packing at a moment's notice. And there were the calm, quiet, purposeful movements and directions of his wife. Edith Pigott had a frail body but a strong spirit: she came of a brave race. The quiet self-possession, the courage—and it was a social period when a tremulous fearfulness was held a feminine grace—of all our ladies filled me with wonder and admiration. Whatever the agitation within there was no display of it without. They were in no way a hindrance, in every way a help: unagitated, attentive to the work in hand.

The having got so many things ready to take away the day before proves of essential service now. We are soon packed. And it was only at the very last, just as we were about to leave, that I, unseen, saw Edith, lingering at the door of her delightful drawing-room, cast behind her a look such as Eve cast back through the gate of Eden. It is not pleasant to abandon your house to plunder and havoc.

We are all without. Tom Jackson and his wife drive up. We mount.

"I intend to keep the bullock-cart with me, Jackson," Septimus calls out; "so if you think that too slow you had better drive on."

"We could drive fast for a short way only," says Jackson.

"When we get to the head of the road to the Fort"—it lay not far off—"we shall be able to go at a foot pace only."

So we form a procession, Septimus leading, next the bullock-cart with the servants and the goats, then Tom Jackson, and then I. In each of the three vehicles ready-loaded guns and rifles. When we reach the road leading out of the station to the Fort we find it thronged, blocked; not only have we to proceed at a foot pace, but at a foot pace varied by frequent stoppages. The road is crammed, jammed, with vehicles, equestrians, pedestrians: pedestrians, for not only were there here on foot the native servants carrying goods and chattels, carrying children, the dark-faced men and women carrying the white-faced children, together with the poorer members of the community, English or Eurasian, but a great many others, English and East Indians, men and women, who the day before would never have dreamed of walking as far as the Fort, would only have ridden or driven there. The throng pressed furiously on. Every cause for fear. The crowning tragedy of Cawnpore not yet, but what had befallen English people already elsewhere enough to induce haste. Well might men with families, wives and children, grown-up daughters, be eager to reach the Fort. What fear in the heart of each one of us as we thought of what might happen if the enemy broke upon us here, on this helpless multitude—these vehicles thronged with women and children! Every reason for fear. But too often, alas! it displayed itself in all its shamelessness, its callousness, its cruelty, its foolishness, defeating its own object. The mad fury to get on produced delay; confusion, hustling, jostling, struggling, fighting, collisions, entanglements. Horsemen dashed forward heedless of those on foot. The moment there was an opening in front the vehicles pressed forward violently into it. "Drive, coachman, drive!" Then a jam, a block. Our little procession moved on at an even pace, one vehicle close behind the other, the most expeditious mode of progression. As we sat quiet, though with fear in our hearts, we could observe the comic as well as the tragic sides of the scene. The strange assortment of domestic articles on the tops of some of the carriages, articles not usually presented to public view. The queer unclothedness of some of the people. The shouts and cries. "You no

get on to my carriage; get off, get off!" "Hit the horse, Billy, hit him hard." "Twist tail of bullock." And while here were people labouring along under the weight of articles which the day before they would have deemed it as impossible as derogatory to carry, here were others laden with needless articles: people fleeing for their lives and holding on to a birdcage or a bandbox. Here was a woman holding close within her arms, so that she made herself powerless in the surging crowd, an old sofa-cushion. Here was the grotesqueness of terror, a big man mounted on a small pony leaning, with staring eyes, far over the little beast's head as if he would project himself forward.

As we neared the gate of the Fort the press grew greater, the struggle increased, the frenzy deepened. There was a fierce, dangerous heaving forward of horsemen, pedestrians, vehicles. There arose a fierce clamour. "Don't ride over us!" people shouted out from amidst the dust. Women and children—and men—yelled and shrieked. Well was it—for the purpose of our present entry, at all events—that the narrow drawbridge in front of the gateway had been removed long since, the moat just in front of it filled up, that behind the gateway was no narrow, winding covered way. Immediately within the gate was a wide open space in which the congested stream could expand itself. This space was soon covered with horses and people and vehicles of every kind, new and handsome and smart, old and grotesque and dilapidated.

We drew up in the shadow of the Fort wall. We men dismounted. Septimus drew me aside.

"Rats in a trap," he said.

I knew what he meant. At the gate was the usual sepoy guard.

I nodded.

"There!" he said.

The sharp ring of a steel ramrod in a musket barrel.

"Loading—without orders—when not in uniform. We must rush down on them. We have six guns ready loaded here. Must get together some more men. Where are all the men?"

"A lot of them up on the wall there."

"Why have they gone up there? To look down on the road, I suppose. We must get up to them—sharp," and he walks quickly up to the nearest ramp, I with him.

We see what has brought the men up here, a matter of considerable personal interest.

Above the green spread of trees that indicates the position of the station rise up dark columns of smoke, irradiated by myriads of upward-rushing sparks.

"That is your bungalow, De Gruyther."

"Yes."

"That is mine."

"That big smoke?"

"That must be the Mess House."

"That is Sharpley's; there, near the church steeple."

Thus the men exclaim.

"We must get rid of the sepoys below. They have begun to load. Which of you has guns?" Septimus calls out to them.

"I."

"And I." "And I." "And I."

"Where are they?"

"Down below."

"Come down with me; and I want three others to whom I can give guns."

Our band of ten is soon assembled.

We move down toward the gateway, guns ready. We are nearing it.

"They have gone," calls out a voice from above.

The guard had disappeared—evaporated. The men had gone away by twos and threes across the fields. They were eager to get to the Treasury where was heaped up the gold and the silver, wealth in its most concentrated and portable form.

We shut the gate and breathe more freely.

CHAPTER XXXV

WITHIN THE FORT

"SO far so good," said Septimus. "But if the mutineers are after us they can get right up to the gate and burst or blow it open."

"We should fire on them from the top of the wall."

"No cover; come up and see."

We did so. There was no cover. The parapet wall of the two flanking bastions, placed there specially for the defence of the gateway, of the short lengths of wall between them and the gateway, was all ragged and broken, it had not been thought worth while to keep it in repair, the wall below being held quite sufficient for its present civil use without it.

"We must put up a breastwork," I say.

"And mount guns on the bastions. Let us find Baggs."

"Who is he?"

"The Permanent Conductor. Lives in here."

We soon find him: a tall, powerfully-built man, with a soft, easy bearing and address, the look and carriage of a gentleman. Talking of this to Septimus afterwards he informs me that he is a man of good family, "As you can judge by his real name, Isham Bagge: vulgarised into Baggs when he enlisted into the Company's army." The fact is noted because of its great bearing on our fortunes. Owing to it Mr. Baggs liked his present solitary post, not desired of others because of that solitariness, and had been in it for many years, so gaining a knowledge of the contents of the Magazine, and establishing a relationship with the people about, which proved of essential service to us.

"Colonel Munro has not come in?" Septimus asks of him.

Colonel Munro was the officer who had charge of the Factory, of the Fort.

"No."

"And, by the way, why are you not at work to-day, the workmen not here? Because of the outbreak?"

"No; it is a Hindoo holiday."

"Well, as Munro is not here you must help us," and he says what we have come for.

"There are plenty of materials for the barricade, as, for instance, those rows of casks and wooden boxes, those stacks of cut timber, at the foot of the wall."

"Good," says Septimus; "and the wood will serve for cooking, too. Have not had my tea this morning."

"Oh, plenty of firewood and charcoal in here," says Mr. Baggs. "As for the guns for the bastions, there are no heavy guns."

"But all those piles of shot and shell in the yard?" says Septimus.

"The guns were sent away many years ago—at the time of the Punjâb campaign. We have now some six-pounders and three-pounders only."

"Then we must mount the six-pounders: will do for close work."

"For them there is no shot. This is no longer primarily an arsenal."

"We can cram them full of bolts, screws, nuts—won't be nuts for the enemy, eh?"

"We have plenty of musket bullets: if we put them into bags—the bags ready—would serve for shrapnel."

"Good! And now to set to work. I'll send the fellows to you if you will give them the materials."

"Yes."

"I'll just tell my wife and the other ladies."

When we do so Mary Alexander remarks—

"That seems easy work—putting bullets into bags—we could do that—we women. Leave the men free for the heavier work."

"Good, Miss Mary. Be off, you and Mrs. Jackson, and take with you two or three others. Go to Mr. Baggs, the big man walking along there."

We are soon hard at work putting up the breastworks. It was lucky having the material so close, at the very foot of the wall. And it lends itself to the work; we have only to pile the boxes and timber up; and some large bags filled with seeds we discover in a shed near answer admirably for the round of the bastions, serve instead of sandbags. We get together all the grooms; they bring the material up while we pile it into place. We work with a will. The enemy may be on us any moment. We work with our coats off, Septimus with his shirt sleeves rolled up, so exhibiting a pair of brawny arms that do yeoman work, and astonish some of the weedy East Indians, though there are big, strong men among them too. We work with our eyes turned upon the road, looking not only for the enemy, but for friend or relative not yet come in. A vehicle upon it: who are they? A horseman dashing furiously down it: who is he? Two children walking along it hand-in-hand: what tragedy does that import? A big cloud of dust: two of the big Magazine waggons: open wide the gate: furniture belonging to Colonel Munro. He lived in a house between the station and the Fort. Phew! How hot the early morning sun!

We have got the job done. The guns have been placed in the bastions, with their loading rods and sponging rods and ammunition complete. Also, within the bastions, and along the lengths of wall between them and the gateway, are arranged rows of ready-loaded muskets, a suggestion due to Septimus.

"Now I feel better," says he, throwing on again his black alpaca blouse. "Phew!" he was streaming with perspiration, as were we all. "Now for breakfast."

It was being got ready. The wonderful servants had with the help of some clods of earth prepared a kitchen in an angle of the wall, got the cooking-pots and the materials for breakfast out of the cart.

"But we must get under shelter; it is too hot out here for the children—and the flies! We'll go into this office, no work going on to-day."

Mr. Baggs again. Certainly, we can go in there.

"You'll give quarters to the other people too."

"I think I had better wait until Colonel Munro comes in."

"You can assume that much responsibility, surely?"

"Yes; but Colonel Munro may disturb the arrangements made; it would be a trouble for the people to have to move when they had once settled down. Though not so private it is quite as cool out there in the open sheds where they are now. And the Colonel should be in here soon. His servants say he has remained back to load a third waggon with his furniture."

Colonel Munro was notorious as a harsh-tempered, imperious man, a contentious and cantankerous Scot.

"Well, we'll go into the office. I don't think Munro will turn us out."

We found in the office tables and chairs, and what was of far greater importance, a punkah. Septimus played a great knife and fork always, he played a grand one now. We drank oceans of tea.

"And now for a cheroot," said Septimus, and we settled ourselves down to the crowning enjoyment.

"Septimus," said his wife.

"Not a word—interrupting me in my *poojah* (worship), my burning of incense."

"I was thinking that many of the people may not have brought any provisions in with them — the poor little children."

"Good heavens! and here have I been gobbling like a pig; feeding myself and not thinking of my sheep. I'll go at once."

"And I'll go with you," I said.

Mr. Baggs again.

"They can manage for to-day," he says. "I have been able to supply some of those who brought in nothing; they have supplied one another. But how about to-morrow, if the enemy block us in here, as I suppose they mean to? Why, counting the servants, we have about a hundred people in here now; and there are all those horses, there is no grass for them in here. Even if we got over to-morrow we could not get over the day after."

"And I begged them to provision the place," said Septimus, with a groan. "What is to be done now? We cannot get anything in from the station or the town."

"No; but there is a village near here from which we could, and we had better do so at once."

"At once," said Septimus. "I have my cart. I have money. But how to make sure that they will give it, allow it to be brought in?"

"I'll go myself," said Mr. Baggs. "I'll take your cart, and one of the waggons that has just come in with Colonel Munro's furniture."

"Take three or four fellows with you—armed."

"I'll go," I said.

"I shall be better by myself," said Mr. Baggs.

"No, no, we cannot let you go by yourself. I'll go with you and take my shikaree, plucky little fellow, and can handle a gun—we've been together in many a tight place, tiger shooting and elephant shooting—staunch to death he is," said Septimus.

"The safest thing is for me to go by myself," persists Mr. Baggs. "They know me well in the village. Have dealt with them for years, helped them in Government business, doctored them."

"How much money will you want?"

"Won't take any—safest not. Tell them to send a man back with me for payment. They know they can trust me."

Soon from the top of the wall we are watching Mr. Baggs, accompanied by a couple of his own servants, making his way with the two carts toward the village.

And here it becomes necessary to place before the reader the salient points of our position. The outline of the Fort was of the simplest, a rectangle, of which one of the narrower sides, the north one, rested on the river. There was a circular bastion at each of the four corners, also in the middle of each of the four sides, except the south one, in the middle of which was the gateway, with its two flanking bastions. In front of the west face, which looked toward the station, lay a barren plain, affording no cover; in front of the south face, and so of the gateway, the cultivation begins, and there is more cover; while before the east face, and so giving there the most cover, extends the rich cultivation, the fields and groves and gardens of the village referred to above, which lay off the south-east corner bastion, about three-quarters of a mile from it, and was named Kotra. The reader might draw a plan. Looking out from where we are standing, on the top of the south wall, by

the side of the gateway, we see on the open plain in front of us a point—marked by a well, some trees, and a garden—from which a road runs, westward, to the station; another, almost in a line with it, eastward, to Kotra; and a third, almost at right angles to the other two, northward, in a dead straight line, to the gateway. A straggling cart-track conducts from the gateway to the village. Along this last moves Mr. Baggs with the carts. He has disappeared among the trees surrounding the village.

A glowing hour goes by. A sudden cry—"The sepoys are coming!" Like an echo it is repeated in the open space below, produces a terrible commotion there. Women and children come rushing to the foot of the wall, shrieking and calling out to their husbands and fathers and brothers above. We get Mary Alexander and some of the other ladies to quiet them and lead them away. We men seize our arms. The two guns, one in each of the bastions flanking the gateway, are manned; they had been loaded already. On the length of road from the station to the trifurcation, indicated above, a moving cloud of dust. Now we can distinguish. A body of Cavalry; no Infantry, no Guns; neither with it, nor following it. We are not to be attacked just yet. But the force has come out because of us. What does it mean to do? Is it going on to the village? Mr. Baggs has not come back yet.

"They must be making for Kotra, and Baggs in there still," cries Septimus; "we must send and warn him."

"He is just coming out of the village," cries a man.

The troopers have reached the trifurcation. Half of them halt there; the rest move on toward the village. A moment of fierce excitement. Will they cut off the carts? Obviously the half force has been left at the trifurcation to watch the gate. Our eyes kept glancing from the carts, slowly moving on, to this force standing still. How great the effect upon the nerves of that slow motion and that standing still! We watch the body of horsemen as we should watch the landslip, the avalanche, impending over house and home. We look for the slightest sign of movement. They continue to stand still. The carts are nearing the gate. No sign of movement. It may be that the intervening trees are so disposed that they do not see the carts; it may be that seeing them they think they

are ordinary village carts about their everyday work. A movement. They are dismounting. "Dismounting to get a drink of water," says someone. "They are dismounting to remain. They are off-saddling," says Septimus. Our two carts have passed in. *Laus Deo.*

The contents are unloaded on to the masonry floor of a large store-room. We survey with delight the heaps of wheat and barley and rice and lentils.

"Well done, Baggs; you have risked your life for us," said Septimus. "A near thing that."

"It will last us two days, not more," said Conductor Baggs. "There was no more left in the village; but I offered the grain dealers double prices if they would get some more from the town, or elsewhere, and send it in."

"The Nuwâb's troopers may prevent it coming in."

"The double prices will tempt the dealers to do their best to get it in, probably in the night-time."

With the carts came in two men whose coming was to be of great concern to myself, personally. The first was my bearer, Bhola Ram, who had followed in my footsteps and had arrived in the station this morning. The other was a servant of Colonel Munro's. He brought the news of the murder of his master; in his own house: the remaining to send off that other cartload of furniture had cost him his life. So now the question arose, "Who was to be in charge of the Fort?" The senior officer with us was Major Hardy, who had been second in command of the regiment; but he had been brought in dangerously wounded, could not assume it. Of the other senior officers of the regiment two had gone away in the exodus, two had been killed: the subalterns who had escaped into the Fort were all of very nearly my own standing, but all junior to me, as was also Lieutenant Smithson, who had been assistant to Colonel Munro. Major Winterfield, the Commissariat officer, had been killed in attempting to reach the Fort. Thus it came about that the command, such it was, devolved on me. But the foremost man in the defence was Septimus, our strong man, our paladin, foremost in all arrangements as in the fight, our best shot. Good service was rendered also by a great "pal" of his, Mr. Carwithen, an indigo planter, whose co-operation was of special value, as

most of the men were civilians, men who rather resented military control.

We determined to send all the servants and horses out of the Fort at once. A great many of the servants were desirous of leaving themselves: men wished to get back to wife and children, women to husband and children, both to get back to the homes where they had left their goods and chattels. We wished to have as few mouths to feed as possible. We did not wish to retain in the place so many able-bodied men who might possibly prove treacherous. We met with a good deal of opposition and grumbling, not of the servants, but of the masters and mistresses. Each one thought that his or her own servants might be allowed to remain. We had resolved to have a central kitchen, so we kept in three or four men for this: some of the women servants were allowed to remain in special cases: beyond this we carried out, in spite of all remonstrance, the one law, that all the others must go. I kept in my bearer and Septimus' shikaree to serve as scouts, to bring us in information from without: and the shikaree was a good shot. There was much lamentation about sending out the horses, many of which were very valuable. Septimus ordered his to be conveyed to Akbarābad, which they duly were; another instance, among many, of the fidelity of the native servants at that time.

And so the evening came. We men were lucky. We had been occupied. But it had been a terrible day for the poor women and children, thrust out from comfortable homes, the comforts of which were necessaries to them at this terrible time of the year: delicate women and girls thrust out from the privacy and sanctity of their homes. The Fort was a furnace. The flies were in myriads. To bodily suffering was added mental: fear for the future, sorrow for the past. From affluence, ease, security, they had passed to destitution, discomfort, physical suffering, to danger of death and worse. Here were sorrowing women to whom the whole aspect of the world had been changed at a stroke, women deprived, since this morning, of husband and of home.

In the evening Bhola Ram told me of how he had followed me, of what a terrible commotion there had been in the fortress of Hodul when our escape from it had become

known : the fury of the Nuwâb Ali Karim : then the sudden, mysterious silence, the curtain, that fell upon the affair.

He told me why the two mutinous regiments, the forces of the Nuwâb, the mob, the released jail-birds, the hereditary marauders, had not rushed out after us. They were all concentrated round the Treasury : at a deadlock there. The Nuwâb claimed its contents as local ruler ; the sepoys as prize money ; the freebooters by the law of take who can ; they would be content with a share, each of the others wanted the whole.

Night fell. At first it brought no alleviation of the sufferings from the heat, for the heavy buildings within the Fort were pouring forth the warmth they had accumulated during the long hours of the day. It gave relief from the flies. But it brought forth the worst murderers of rest, the mosquitoes. They came up from the river in swarms. They fell on us madly, attracted by our warmer blood under a thinner skin; that attractive combination was presented best by the poor children, whose wailing and crying was to be heard the whole night through.

It was in my ears during most part of the night. I would not lie down during the dark hours of the night. We had sentries on the wall, we had established a watch ; but I could not. The weight of my responsibility lay heavy upon me. I kept awake and vigilant, was kept awake and vigilant, until the early summer dawn was near at hand. Then I threw myself down on the top of the wall and slept.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE ASSAULT

I DID not sleep for long. Things around were barely visible when I awoke. What is that moving towards us upon the track from the adjoining village? Not carts, there is no sound of wheels. A dim column of something moving sinuously along. We arouse the men. We stand to arms. We strain our eyes. "Brinjara bullocks!" cries someone. It was as if in a similar situation in Spain a man had cried out "Muleteers!" The Brinjaras were the great grain-carriers of India in the old days; often transported it on their pack-bullocks over thousands of miles. They were the great food suppliers to armies in the field; played a prominent part in our own earlier campaigns. Open wide the gate. The ghostly train passes in. I have the bullocks unloaded and the men paid, the double price. I have now command of the treasure chest of the Factory, in which there was a considerable sum of money. The Brinjaras and their bullocks disappear: silently steal away. It was a thing well managed. And owing to Mr. Baggs' thoughtfulness, and his personal relations with the dealers, one of the bullocks had come in with a load of miscellaneous supplies from the "Europe Shop" of old Eduljee, the fire-worshipper; among them a large packet of the important article, tea. How we always looked forward to a draught of the divine, refreshing beverage, after the hot, restless, wakeful night!

"I suppose you have some big cauldron in which we could boil the water?" Septimus asks of Mr. Baggs this morning.

"Plenty."

"Then we'll have the tea for all made straight in that, picnic fashion. There are things to drink it out of?"

"Plenty of tin pots."

"Rather hot to the lips, but they'll do."

"There are plenty of gallipots."

"Better."

"I'll take charge of the commissariat, Jack," he goes on to say to me. "I'll go and get the tea ready, and get some of the ladies to distribute the tin pots and the gallipots."

He bustles away.

There was a well of sweet water in the Fort. Its high, handsome masonry platform stood conspicuous at one end of the open space behind the gateway. There was plenty of firewood.

Most of the men are now gathered about the well, washing their hands and faces, drawing the water to take it to their families—there were plenty of buckets in the place—"buckets wood" and "buckets zinc," as they are entered on Magazine books. Hark! What is that? Listen! Do you hear it? Yes. Faint and distant, but still clear. Now clearer. A familiar sound, a well-known air. The sound of fifes and drums, the jaunty strain of "Hieland Laddie." "The march of our late regiment, you know," said Tom Jackson, who stood near me; "the sepoys are coming out against us."

We hurry to the top of the wall. I find Mr. Baggs standing there with a telescope in his hand. I ask him for it.

"Keep it, sir," he says; "there are plenty in the store-room below."

My hearing was naturally very sharp, had been made sharper by the listening for the movements of animals in the jungle. I knew before I looked that now a full force was coming out against us: I had distinguished the clatter of hoofs, the rumble of guns, the tramp of infantry. Through the telescope I see that there are only two guns. The attacking, or investing, force has just emerged from the avenue of trees which marks the boundary of the station; beyond that the rest of the road up to the trifurcation, that memorable point, as well as the road from that point to the gateway, lies below us open and bare, un-tree-shaded; but the third road, leading from there to the village, has large umbrageous trees by its side, which serve to conceal any movement along it from our view.

The news of the approach of the enemy has spread among

the fugitives and produced a great commotion. There is a great rushing about, and screaming and shouting. As on the day before, women and children rush to the foot of the wall screaming out to husbands, fathers, brothers, sons. I go down to stop this. It is demoralising to the men. I am helped by Septimus; but we could not have managed it—some of the women seemed quite frenzied, they belonged to a race and class given to violent display of emotion—but for the aid of some of our ladies, Mary Alexander and others, who, disciplined to control and not display emotion, moved about calm, quiet, self-possessed; they soothed the mothers, took the children by the hand and led them away.

"Oh, the enemy is at hand! He is coming to kill us! Now the blood will flow!"

It was not a woman who called out thus. It was a man—a big stout man, a man of middle age, not an old man or a boy. He was seated on the ground with his back against a wall, shivering and shaking.

"What is the matter?" I said, as Septimus and I came up to him. "What are you doing down here? You ought to be up above there, on the top of the wall."

"I—I—I have got the ague," he said from between his chattering teeth. His eyes seemed staring out of his head.

"Then go inside and lie down and cover yourself up."

"I—I—will."

"And keep your mouth shut, and do not shout out as you were doing just now. Mind that."

"Looks as strong as a horse," I said, as Septimus and I walked away. "Saw him run down from the wall just now. Thought he was coming to fetch something. The ague fit must have come on very suddenly."

"Very!" said Septimus, dryly. "Immediately at sight of the enemy. My dear boy, no ague fit at all. Pure, unadulterated funk."

"No!"

"I am sorry to say, as the fellow is an Englishman, yes."

"Then I'll go back and kick the beast up, and make him return to the top of the wall."

"Leave him. Would be of no use. Might disturb the others."

"I remember now—it has been working in my brain—it is the fellow we saw yesterday on the road on a small pony."

"I'll bring the tea to the wall; it will set the men up. I suppose there is time?"

"Yes; they cannot move faster than the guns." The guns were drawn by bullocks.

The adverse force is slowly wending its way forward as I regain the top of the wall. We had seen it very far off.

Septimus and his shikaree appear carrying the tea in buckets, Mary Alexander and Alice Jackson and an East Indian girl carry the tin pots, slung, appropriately, on ramrods. We gulp down the tea. We hurry the women away. What a high, brave look in Mary's eyes! As she turns away she gives me a glance, unforgettable, unforgotten.

The time has come. The enemy has reached the well, the trifurcation, where the troopers who had stationed themselves there the day before, and remained there during the night, have already turned out. What his intent? This soon appears. The force halts. The two guns, they are nine-pounders, move down the straight road leading toward the gate. The teams halt, the guns are turned round, put in position on either side of the road, pointing down it at the gateway. They intend to carry the place by assault; to pound the gate in.

Their form of attack made known, I have to make my disposition to meet it. The gate was a strong one; we strengthened it further with a backing of casks and wooden cases and balks of timber, and by rolling a heavy waggon up against it; these would serve, also, to hinder a rush through it in case it fell. About a hundred and twenty yards from the gateway the road crossed a narrow, but deep, drainage line by means of a culvert. The assaulting party must cross this: it is from there that the final rush must be made. The enemy have chosen the direct, dangerous mode of attack because they think poorly of our means of defence. They know exactly the condition of things in the Fort, the want of ammunition for the guns, that the defenders are mostly civilians, a great many of them of a class on which, because of its clerkly employment and mixed nationality, the sepoys looked down with sovereign contempt. They would

attack with confidence. I meant them to approach in that confidence. Then I meant to concentrate our fire on them at the culvert. Not a shot was to be fired until they got there. The power of such a concentrated fire is great. The heavy, destructive, demoralising stroke of even one such discharge often determines the fate of a battle. Nelson won Trafalgar by one broadside. I meant to train the guns in both the bastions, those on either side of the gateway, on the culvert. But I found that only the one in the right-hand bastion could be brought to bear on it. I changed my first disposition of the men. We were thirty-one or thirty-two all told; six non-commissioned officers, all trained artillerymen, splendid men, went to work the gun; the remainder I had divided equally, men and boys, between the barricades on either side of the gateway, from it to the bastions. But now I place only men, those the ones I think likely to be the steadiest, on the right-hand side, where I take my own stand; on the other side I place all the lads, but I put Septimus and the shikaree with them to strengthen and steady them.

The attack was to be made on us, not mob fashion, but in accordance with military rules; we had against us men trained by ourselves. The two guns placed, the infantry is thrown out in open order on either side, with the exception of a small compact body which forms the actual storming, or assaulting, party, I presume, which takes its stand on the road. Now it and the skirmishers advance, move on in silence for some distance; then a bugle sounds, and the two guns and the extended lines of infantry open fire: a sudden dull roar, the run of jets of flame along the lines on either side, the sharp crackle of musketry. The ball has opened.

In reading the account of our defence it will have to be borne in mind how different the old muskets were in quickness, range, and precision of fire, to the modern rifle. To us the possession of a few first-class long-range sporting rifles gave a great advantage.

Of the first two shots from the guns one had gone whistling over our heads, the other had struck the gate with a dull roar which must have carried terror into the hearts of the poor women below. The next two shots did not strike the gate, but each one came full, with heavy crash, against the breast-

work on either side, knocking a large hole out of the one to the left. At the same time the bullets pattered against wall and breastwork, went whistling overhead. The effect of this and the breach in the breastwork on the lads behind that barrier was that four or five of them leaped up and fired down on the enemy, thus exposing themselves greatly. And not only this but two of the grown men with me leaped up, as if by some uncontrollable impulse, and did the same. To withhold fire needs great steadiness. "Down!" I roared and shouted: "no firing without orders." One of the two men who had leaped up sank down dead. The fire was close and heavy. The round shot crash against the barriers. It is as if they were aimed at them and not at the gate; that could not have been missed continually if aimed at. Looking at the assaulting party carefully through my glass, I see that many of the men carry bags—bags of powder, of course. They mean to blow the gate open, not batter it in. They wish to destroy the cover afforded by the breastworks; their aim is at them. And the aim is good; the Nuwâb's artillerymen were men trained in our own service. Only two of the round shot had missed the aim. Some struck the breastwork just at the top, a most destructive shot, if not for the structure for the men behind, for it sent the splinters flying thick among them, wounding many; but most struck it full, with continually increasing damaging and destroying effect. Now a long length of the breastwork to the left goes clattering down the wall. The enemy shout. The culvert is close before them. The bugle sounds. The nearest skirmishers converge upon the culvert: they mass upon it with the storming party. The moment has arrived. I give the signal to fire.

I do so with an anxious heart. I do not know how steady my untried men may be in face of the bullets and round shot when they raise themselves above the protecting level of the barrier. If our long-reserved fire does not tell, the rush of the attackers may carry them on to the gate, to the shelter of the wall; to the laying of the powder bags and the explosion. There was that danger in letting the enemy get so near to his objective.

But it does tell. The blow falls well. The volley and the fire of the gun in the bastion roll out simultaneously; the

shower of bullets pours down full upon them. They stagger back from the culvert, leaving it covered with their dead and wounded. Conductor Baggs, whom I had placed in charge of the gun in the right-hand bastion, has reloaded his piece with incredible rapidity; the men behind the breastwork have dropped their empty muskets and seized the loaded ones standing ready to their hands; another dose of bullets among them ere they have recovered from their consternation and surprise, and though our fire was not so effective as before, the men not firing so steadily, they drop the powder bags, they break, they scatter, they run back. Our improvised grape unthought of, they had not expected to be exposed to a fire such as this. The skirmishers maintain their ground for a while; but they, too, are soon running back, striving to get out of range as quickly as possible, for Septimus and his shikaree are making deadly play among them with their rifles. The attack has failed. *Laus Deo.*

"The enemy has got in, Captain" (they call me Captain), cries a man, his voice thin and shrill from excitement.

"Got in! What do you mean?"

"Into the Fort."

"Into the Fort!" I say, thinking the man had gone off his head.

"Yes; into the bastion, there"; and he points along the wall toward the south-east corner bastion, the one off which lay the village. In it the flash of sword blades.

"Come on!" I shout, as I rush along the wall toward it.

Two of the enemy in it, holding the narrow entrance into it from this side with their drawn swords in their hands. How have they got in? They must have come up a ladder. I jump on to the step of the parapet wall, and look down over it. A rush of bullets by my ear. They come from behind the shelter of the walls of an old dismantled building below the bastion. I see no ladder. It must be on the other side of the round. The men coming behind have passed by me, rushed on toward the opening leading into the bastion: the foremost of them, a young East Indian lad, brave and eager, has reached it; he is cut down. The two following him discharge their muskets, but hurriedly, ineffectually. They fall back. They have nothing but the empty muskets in their hands. There is a

block. The terreplein is not wide. Those behind cannot use their muskets. A third man has appeared in the bastion. He has only a spear in his hand; but he may be followed by others with firearms. The two swordsmen are holding the opening to give time to their friends to come up. There is a recoil of our men. Those keen, flashing blades are new things. Before the opening lies the ghastly heap of young De Monte's body, the blood gushing from the fearful wound, flowing away a crimson stream. A critical situation. The recoil has made an opening for me. Drawing my sword (I had provided myself with a cavalry broadsword from the armoury—it was not in any way so beautiful a weapon as the tulwar which Tukht Singh had given me, and which I still possessed, but I could handle it better—the hilts of most tulwars are too small for our English hands), I rushed toward the opening and precipitated myself in through it. The men gave way before my sudden, headlong, unexpected assault. But they were brave fellows, there being here proof. They sprang forward against me. I ought to have fought a retreating fight, there being two to one; but I held my ground, for my great object was to keep the way behind me clear. They press me close. I am wounded in the left arm; a snick across it above the elbow—it would have been worse had I not made a sudden turn. The man has raised his sword for another cut, when it is sent whistling away into space, away over the edge of the bastion. The strong blow has come from the butt end of Septimus' rifle. The disarmed man runs back. His place is taken by the man with the spear. But now our men have begun to use their muskets, the shot flying uncomfortably near us two. Our opponents begin to retire toward the point of the parapet over which we have seen the other man disappear. They do so slowly, making a good fight. The man with a sword makes a sudden dash at us to cover the retreat of his companion armed with the less effective weapon of the spear; then twirls round suddenly, bounds toward the parapet, a man as active on his legs as strong in the arm, over it and gone. Arrived at the same point, we see a ladder below. But it is empty, and the attacking party is retreating across the fields to the village; their retirement expedited by our men sending shots after them, before which several of them fall.

What had happened was this. So much had the military character of the old fortress become a thing of the past that a large timber godown had been built—for some reason of convenience—on the road leading from the Fort to the village, and quite close to the south-east corner bastion, in most unmilitary contiguity to it. This had been dismantled, unroofed, but the walls had been allowed to remain, and gave great shelter. The opportunity thus afforded them had been seen by some men of the attacking force sent round through the village. That this side attack was not a premeditated one—they had been so completely confident of the success of the attack on the gate—was proved by the use of the village ladder, which, luckily for us, proved not quite long enough.

A flag of truce to remove their dead and wounded. Their force marches back to the town, leaving only watching detachments behind: one at the trifurcation, as before, one in the village.

We have to attend to our own dead and wounded. For the latter there was no medical aid. (Both the regimental doctor and the civil surgeon had been killed: their poor wives and children were now in the Fort.) But I found them having their wounds dressed by Mary Alexander. She had belonged to an ambulance class. She had got to help her a young East Indian girl. Those were the days when an exquisite sensibility—the screaming at a mouse—was looked on as a feminine grace. The girl belonged to an emotional class and race.

"Oh my! No can do! No can look at blood!" she had exclaimed, exhibiting the sensibility she deemed attractive and proper, when the wounded men had first come down. But the natural soon took the place of the artificial; she was really a brave, kindly girl: Mary's example was before her: and she saw that the men approved more of Mary's helpful quietness than of her sentimental flutter. In the succeeding days Mary found in Flora De Silva a most heroic and self-sacrificing helpmate in her work among the wounded, the sick, the sorrowful, the fearful, the despairing.

Going down the ramp and approaching where Mary was at work, she gives me a glance which has taken its place among those never to be forgotten.

"I did not know you could do this," I said, as I looked on admiring.

"I attended an ambulance class," she said.

"It is proving of great service here."

"I hope so. But you, too, are wounded," she adds, as she looks quickly up. "Your sleeve is all bloody."

"I have got a cut on the arm."

I am her last patient. How delightful the look of anxious concern on her face as I bare my arm, how joyous the tender, careful binding up!

The wounded attended to, so unexpectedly, we have now to attend to the dead. Beside the lad and the man of whom mention has been made there was another man killed. We carried the three bodies down and laid them out in different parts of a long office-room. What terrible mourning over them there! The lad "the only son of his mother, and she a widow."

Life and death run very close together, more especially in war time. Those to their mourning, and we to our breakfast.

The grown-up members of our small party—all of us who had come together had found accommodation in the office—took this as served out from the central cooking place. Septimus could have supplemented it from the store of tinned and other provisions he had brought in, and he liked a good meal. But with regard to these provisions, and the wine he had brought in, he proclaimed a self-denying ordinance: they were to be held as hospital stores, for the exclusive use of the sick and the ailing. He had proclaimed the ordinance for the men of our party only, but our ladies insisted on joining in it. It was only our children who were allowed to have a prior claim. Thus Septimus alone had command of the precious article milk, from the fortunate circumstance of having brought in his flock of goats with him. The first claim on this was that of our two children: after that it all went to the other children. Septimus could cook a good dinner as well as eat one. I had often had proof of his culinary skill when we had been out in camp together. It was displayed now in the cooking of little dishes for the sick and wounded: the bending over a fire on a day such as this

was no pleasant task: he ministered as devotedly to their physical as he did to their spiritual needs.

Septimus played as good a knife and fork at the present meal as at the better one of the day before. He was very hilarious and jubilant.

"We have fought a good fight," he said. "We have given them a slap in the face. They won't be in such a hurry to come at us again. They thought to have a walk over. And Delhi must have fallen ere this."

That was the abiding, sustaining hope.

"Oh, Father Septy," said the little girl, "there is a hole in your hat!"

"Two holes—one on this side and one on that; see, Mrs. Pigott," said Philip, bringing up the article and showing it to her.

"Oh, Septimus!" said Edith, as she went deadly white.

"Tut! Nothing!" said Septimus. "Quite at the top. No more danger than if I had been standing in my church and a shot had gone through the steeple."

The comparison was not a bad one, for the hat in question very closely resembled a hat of the steeple-crowned order of the Puritan times.

"The hat should be high in the crown, to keep the sun off the top of the head, and have a sloping brim to shade the temples," Septimus had said, and so he had a *solah* (pith) hat built on those lines, the result being a thing like an extinguisher, under which, and mounted on his shooting pony, he looked like Sancho Panza in the headgear of Sir Hudibras.

"Now would you children like a game?"

"Yes; we'll play the game of horse and elephant like as at home," said the little girl.

"Come along then, Jack," he said to me, and he knelt down. Of course I was the horse, Septimus the elephant; and Maud hoisted Elsie on to his back, and Mary hoisted Philip on to mine, and held them there; and we perambulated the room, and I neighed and kicked, and Septimus, as he shuffled along with true elephantine shuffle, squealed and trumpeted so that it made us all laugh; and Mary cried "Gee up!" and "Wo ho!" while Maud cried "Myl!" and

"Duth!" in the elephant language, and the children shouted with delight.

"And now I must be off to see some of the poor sick people," said Septimus.

Poor sick people indeed, ill of cruel and agonising diseases, in here, where there was nothing to alleviate or relieve, everything to aggravate them, hard lying, unsuitable food, terrible heat, swarms of flies, last, not least, want of privacy. He attended, as I have said, to their physical as to their spiritual needs. He prayed with them, he comforted, and cheered, and soothed, and sustained them. A laughing man and a praying man, sincerely pious and an inveterate joker, both sides of his nature were used to help the people in their afflictions. He could speak very tenderly as he could laugh very loudly. He strove to make them comfortable, and he extracted fun out of all his various expedients—military articles were put to strange civil uses. He tried to supply the great, the terrible want, at this season of the year, when they are needed to procure sleep at night, not only by mitigating the heat but keeping off the mosquitoes, of punkahs: he swung all sorts of substitutes for them. He put up curtains. He arranged bathing places. He took away the bales of cloth, of which there was a large store, and had them converted into sheets and towels. He made little drinks and dishes. He brought the hot tea for which there was so constant a craving (in all this much helped by Mary Alexander) to those who could not go for it themselves. Now you saw him in a shed, seated on a tub turned upside down, fanning a sleeping sick child, procuring for it the sleep it could not have had otherwise, keeping his position for great lengths of time, he a man so impatient. Now in the midst of the blazing sunshine, in which his steeple-crowned hat, which bore a resemblance, likewise, to the famous headgear of Robinson Crusoe, proved of essential service, you saw him moving continually across the open space from the well, a full bucket of water in either strong hand. Constant in help.

I hurried away to make arrangements for the entered bastion, now proved a weak point in our defence. The dismantled godown so close below it was a standing menace, a standing danger. It stood in villainous contiguity. I should

have liked to have gone out and tried to blow down some of the walls. But it was too dangerous. The enemy had left a large watch party in a grove without the village. The only thing to be done was to put up a breastwork round the bastion and along the wall on either side, as we had done near the gateway. Finding that the gun in this bastion did not bear on the villainous ruins, I had a gun placed in the bastion in the middle of the east wall. That did.

Another laborious piece of manual labour that we had to undertake on that hot flaming afternoon was the digging of a pit for the dead. We dug it in the little cemetery, the yard of the dead, which had been established when our troops garrisoned the place. How dreary it looked, a small square inclosure with high brick walls, like a prison yard. We were to make a great addition to the small company of Christian folk that had lain there by themselves for the past half-century. We buried them all together—the lad and the two men killed, a boy that had died—at sunset, Septimus reading the Burial Service over them, "these our brothers," in his full canonicals, which his servant had brought in.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE SECOND ATTACK

THE darkness hung heavy in the west, in the east was only just beginning to give way to the first faint glimmer of dawn when I am awakened by the man on guard. A movement upon the road leading out from the station. I listen. There are the sounds of the morning before, the commingled clatter of horses' hoofs, the tramp of many feet, the rumble of gun wheels. They are coming out against us again. We pass the word round and stand to our arms.

Slowly they move eastward, and fast westward moves the light driving back the darkness. The long array stands out clear when it has reached the head of the road leading to the gateway, to the trifurcation, the halting-point of the day before. The present force does not halt there; it passes on; on by the well, the trees; on along the road leading to the adjacent village, to Kotra. It will be as I had foreseen, as, in fact, was obvious. They will attack from the vantage-point of the dismantled godown. We hurry to that south-east corner bastion. I place Mr. Baggs, who had worked his gun so well on the preceding day, in charge of the gun mounted on the bastion in the middle of the east front—the "mid-east" bastion we called it.

The first movement of the enemy is the placing of their two guns by the side of a grove facing that mid-east bastion. With them they open fire on the breastwork round the south-east corner bastion and along the walls near, which we had put up the day before. "I think we can touch up those fellows at the guns," says Septimus, and he and the others with rifles open fire on them, and effectively, for the guns are withdrawn. But their roar is heard again not long after. They have been taken inside the grove, and openings having

been cut in the earthen bank surrounding it to serve as embrasures, they renew their work from there, the grove forms a safe, shady battery. We fire on it from our guns, but our improvised grape is of no service at that distance.

The second movement is the advance of a large body of infantry from the village towards the dismantled godown. When they get within range a portion of them halt and take position behind what shelter they can find: the rest run on quickly in open order: among them are men who carry ladders, planks, bundles of brushwood, and such-like material: we fire on these: a ladder drops; it is picked up and carried on again; the advance is covered by a heavy fire from those behind; the advance party has reached the dismantled godown, crowded into it; Baggs rattles the grape from his gun in among the walls, but with the material they have brought they have soon filled up the openings in the walls looking our way, established themselves securely; then we are exposed to a fire from the men under cover so close below us as well as from those extended across the fields. There is now a continued rattle of musketry, broken at intervals by the boom of the guns, short intervals, for the guns are served as quickly as accurately. Now and then in the midst of the whizz of the bullets comes the harsh hum of a nine-pounder shot rushing close overhead. But mostly the heavy shot strike the breastwork, rending it, shaking it, bringing down lengths of it. We rush forward between the shots from the guns to repair the damage. But the bullets fly thick. There is death in the air. We have several men wounded, two killed. We cannot afford such loss. We must reserve ourselves for the third movement. It is perfectly obvious what that will be. An attempt to escalade. I distribute the men along the south and east walls so as to cover the full round of the corner bastion. It comes, that third movement. A greater hail of musketry even than before, a shout, and a storming party rushes out of the ruined godown with two ladders. They are planted. They are covered with men ascending. But we have many men here, like Septimus, accustomed to big-game shooting, cool, steady, deadly shots, otherwise they would not have ventured against tiger and wild elephant on foot. The men begin to drop from the ladders,

hang from them, lie across the rungs impeding the way, begin to jump off them, not liking the situation. And Baggs has got his gun to sweep across the space between the godown and the bastion which the assaulters had to traverse, on which they had to take their stand. The force of the assault is broken. We have stemmed the first rush. And in that first rush lies the great danger. It had carried the foremost three or four men of one party right up one of the ladders, right into the bastion. But some of our men had sprung forward, met them there, disposed of them, shot them down, hurled them back. There is now a pause, a hesitancy. I look for the recoil. But they throw out a body of infantry in front of the grove in which the guns are, and these and one of the guns open a heavy fire on Baggs' bastion: the men in the fields below us and in the godown open a fiercer fire upon us: the other gun is loaded and fired as quickly as may be: and from the godown rushes out a body of green-turbaned swordsmen, Ghazees, those fierce fanatics whose reckless valour has often put a severe strain on the steadiness of our own very best troops. They rush across the intervening space. They swarm up one of the ladders. We pour our fire upon them and many drop. But they are reckless of death. They gain the foot of the ladder: they swarm up. They reach the top of the ladder—brave men. But beyond that they do not get. Some of our marksmen keep their eye on that point, reserve their fire for it: the moment a man shows clear there he drops: man after man drops, dead or wounded. Even that fierce ardour droops in face of this hopelessness. That wave, too, has spent its onward force, and, as with the wave on the seashore, now comes the backward surge. Some of our men, among them Septimus the strong-armed, rush forward and hurl the two ladders down. They are carried away. The attack has failed.

Again, as on the day before, is shown the white flag of truce and they carry away their dead and wounded. But not as on the day before does the attacking force return to the station. It remains. The infantry thrown out in the fields retires to the village. The two guns remain in the grove, the dismantled godown continues to be held. "Why was it ever allowed to be built so close to the walls of a fort?" one might have asked

angrily, had not one known that the Fort had become a factory, and that an outbreak such as this had never been anticipated. Only their dead and wounded are sent back to the station, and on the road leading out from it, a couple of hours later, we see the line of carts and camels that are bringing out the baggage of the now investing force.

"They have come to remain," says Septimus. "We shall have to keep our eyes open to-night."

We carry down our dead, three again, as on the preceding day. The wounded have been attended to, as on it, by Mary Alexander and Flora De Silva, the East Indian girl, now calm, quiet, efficient.

We empty our many tin pots, or gallipots, of hot tea—oh, the refreshment of it!—we munch the leathery unleavened cakes of the day before. Then we have a smoke, that strong desire with most men, so that it is a man's saying that his pipe is meat and drink and lodging to him, especially in arduous circumstances, a desire which most of us would have been unable to gratify here but for the self-sacrificing beneficence of Septimus. He was famous for his cheroots and cigars. He was wont to say that he rated a good cigar higher than a good glass of wine. He had brought in a box full. But with regard to them, too, he established a self-denying ordinance, shared them with those who were not similarly well provided. Then we set to work to repair and renew our demolished breastworks, using various devices for the sheltering of the men engaged in the work. For some while the guns in the grove opened fire on us, we, in return, sending rifle bullets in through the embrasures; then they ceased firing, most probably in order to husband their ammunition. More troublesome was the musket fire from the dismantled godown. But we discovered that we could enfilade the building from the distant south-west corner bastion, from which we could injure them with our rifle fire while their return smooth-bore fire was ineffective. We could also fire down into the godown from the top of the gateway, which was of the lofty, demivaulted, Mahomedan type, having across its top a gallery of the usual sort, a series of small cupolas resting on slender sandstone columns, in which our marksmen could find cover, a cover they soon improved. With our superior

weapons and marksmanship the occupants of the godown found this flank fire so dangerous and disturbing that besides the barrier of brushwood they soon began to throw up an earthen bank, which they continued to raise higher and higher all through the day.

We had our task, and so had the women and girls below. The Brinjaras had brought in corn, not flour. This had to be ground. We had two hand-mills belonging to Mr. Baggs' servants. And so all through the afternoon the two women, or two girls, were to be seen grinding at one mill. All through the afternoon was to be heard the harsh ghurr of the stones, for the flour now formed the main part of our sustenance, and there were many mouths to feed. The prophet noted the absence of that sound as the great mark of desolation—"Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle" (Jer. xxv. 10), but it was no sound of cheerfulness to us, it was to us a convict task, a prison and not a home task.

In the evening we buried our killed—we had suffered a large loss in proportion to our numbers.

We expected a wakeful night. There was a disturbance unlooked for.

On the bank of the river, just above the Fort, made there to be near it, was a *ghaut*, or landing-place. A cart-track ran up from this by our west face, along the fosse. At a place where the road ran very near the ditch a great quantity of bamboos, saplings, and brushwood had been stacked between it and the edge of the moat. They had been brought down by boat from the forests high up the river; deposited here awaiting removal inland. A little after dark the sentry on that west wall sent me word that he heard a movement among the stacks. The being attacked from different points was our great danger. I hurried to the spot. There was no doubt about the matter. There were men among the stacks. "What is to be done?" I asked of Septimus and Mr. Carwithen who were with me. "We cannot allow them to remain there, lodged so close below us."

"We must place a strong guard on the wall," said Carwithen.

"Burn them out, smoke them out," said Septimus. "Set fire to the stacks."

"But how? We might send a man creeping along the ditch, but it would be very risky, and not certain."

"Chuck down something from here, we have plenty of materials, flax, tow, empty tar-barrels," says Septimus.

We quickly bring from the store-rooms a large quantity of flax and tow and cloth torn into strips, and tying these into large mops and sprinkling them with oil and turpentine set fire to them, and taking them up on the points of lances heave them over, as haycocks are flung up on to the top of a waggon. We fling over four or five of them at once, together, but these fall short, or falling near the stacks or on them are soon beaten out. Our further attempts become dangerous. The flaming bundles produce a cresset-like glare and the men advancing to the edge of the wall to fling them over are shot at. The muskets flash in the darkness, our men fire down at the flashes. The sound of this firing, in the night-time, resounds terrifyingly through the Fort. Many of the flaming bundles fall on the stacks of saplings, but that does not avail, the saplings are green. But at last two of them fall close together right into the middle of an enormous stack of light brushwood. The long, fierce sunshine has dried it to tinder. It catches, it takes, it flares up. That is enough. A fierce blaze, a crackle, a roar. The flame heap dries everything around it. The fire spreads fast, and faster; increasingly fast. The men run out from among the burning stacks, dash across the margin of the glare, away into the darkness. One or two of our men discharge their pieces at them, but I stop that: it was too dangerous for them. The stacks of brushwood built up the loftier, but also the more transient, pillars of flame. (Pillars of flame that cast their radiance along long lengths of wall, far out on the level plain. "They will be able to see them from across the river," said a man.) The stacks of saplings and bamboos continued to burn, to roar and crackle, almost the whole night through.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A SAD DAY

THE next was a day of strain and death, though the enemy lay so strangely quiet. Poor Major Hardy, he who would have been in command of the Fort but for his prostration, died. I went to see him. Mary was with him. She had made the care of the poor, lonely gentleman her special charge. "I am going fast," he said, and some tears of weakness, natural self-pity—it had come, the parting with dear life, the end of it all—ran down his yellow cheeks. Mary bent down and wiped them gently away.

"Would you like to send any message to those at home—in England?" I said.

"Lost sight of them—they of me—long ago. Never been back since I came out. The regiment has been my home—now it is broken up," and he turned his face to the wall.

He died about midday. Septimus was with him when he died.

The other (adult) death was a strange one. It was that of the big strong man who was a coward. To take the morning air he used to place his chair, not in the open space in front of his quarters, where the children played about, but in the safe security of the inclosed yard behind. To-day he was killed there sitting in his chair; struck on the head by a bullet. The yard was not a large one; the bullet must have come straight down from the sky, probably from a musket discharged, accidentally, straight up into the air; or it may have been discharged from a position high up, the top of a tree, and glanced down from the corner of one of the buildings. At all events it was a single, stray, accidental shot. And so the coward was killed in his place of shameful concealment while brave men escaped in their places of honourable exposure. So may it be.

A day of woe and suffering. Owing to some access of energy in the sun the heat was greater than ever. The inside of the Fort was as a vast reverberating furnace. One evil of that climate—a climate that has taken the marrow out of the bones of every successive race that has come into it from more bracing regions—is the long periods of dead stillness in the air. The air hangs immovable, unchanged, for weeks over town and village, impregnated, surcharged with evil exhalations—oh, the foul suffocation of it! Within the walls here the air was dead still, and how impure! There were bad diseases tainting it. And with reference to another and greater cause of defilement, suffice it to say in one sentence that where many are gathered together—as in a camp on a campaign—it is impossible to make regulations and arrangements that will prevent things offensive to all the senses; that the unavoidable outrages to decency and modesty were not among the least of the evils to be borne at that terrible time. The polluted air aggravated the diseases—spread some, induced others. The stifling heat and the swarms of flies—well was the plague of them numbered with the rivers of blood and the slaying of the firstborn—added to their tortures. Sad sights and sounds, woeful sights and sounds, loathsome sights and sounds. Poor children with horrid sores. Flies hanging in clusters in their eyes. About us, loud or low, the sounds of suffering and grief: the wail of sorrow, the moan of pain. The agonised faces, the passionate weeping. Women and children mourning for the recent dead. Painful, sickening sights connected with disease. Oh, for the love that overcame the loathing! The sad, humbling incidents of the sick-chamber without its privacy. Alas, for poor humanity!

On the poor women a double burthen: that of their own bodily sufferings and those of their poor children, sufferings which they could not assuage.

What bodily sufferings! what tearings of the heart! what memories! what apprehensions!

When the enemy had come out against us first there had been gloom and dread, but these had been dissipated on their retirement, foiled; there had been a reaction of relief, of joy, of hopefulness. But now he was lodged within arm's length of us. Not now the rebound, the relief, the delight of release

from strain, but the strain continuous. On us men the strain of an unceasing vigilance; on the women of an unceasing fear. Terror never folded its dark wings for them. There was an ever-gnawing dread; fear ever tearing at their hearts; a horrible dread for themselves and their children, their little children and their grown-up sons and daughters; a continued agony of apprehension. And there were many that gave suck, and many that were heavy with child.

What a long day, and how crowded with evil! The night brought relief, the relief of darkness, and though late and not for long, the relief of a comparative coolness. But it brought its own pains, the blind, brooding, sorrowful night with its haunting shapes of fear.

There was no hilariousness at our midday meal to-day, because he who produced it, Septimus, was sad. He did his best to keep up the spirits of the people as he moved about amongst them, but when he returned to our quarters his own fell, for the first time, at all events visibly. His child was sick. Poor Elsie lay on her bed pale and wan like a fading flower. There was no disease, only an access of her weakness due to adverse conditions; a sudden lowering of the feebly burning vital flame; a further loss of colour on the pale cheek, like the further paling of the sunset glow on a cloud, sad presage of its vanishing.

She looked up at us with sad, quiet eyes. His eye marked the change. His face blenched as it had never done in face of any danger.

"Have you had your sago, darling?"

"No, daddy. Daddy!"

"Why has she not had her sago?" he said angrily to his wife.

She understood. He was not angry with her. He never was. It was the anger that men feel against the uncommandable, uncontrollable decrees of fate, in presence of which women only weep, and pray, openly or silently. And death, and parting, and the spirit pang, and sago! Oh, strange admixture of the spiritual and the material, of the vast spiritual and the petty material, that makes up this our life!

"Yes," said Edith softly, "it was made for her, but she would not take it."

"It must have been badly made."

"Daddy! Daddy!" said the child softly, looking up at him, as he turned again towards her. Oh, the deep, infinite, yearning tenderness in her look and voice! It made one's heart ache with its intensity. In her little life he had been all in all to her. She had no brothers or sisters, and could have no companionship with other healthy, strong, robust, boisterous children. He had been father, brother, playmate, nurse. When I had stayed with them I had seen how he would play with her; how he would carry her to every corner of the grounds and garden; how when we went down to see the horses, or the dogs, or the poultry, or the sheep, he would carry her with him. I had seen how none of the pleasures in which, with his strong vitality, he took such keen delight, had power to take him away from his little girl, if his going made any difference to her. I had seen Edith look at him with a strange look, not of jealousy, but of wonder at the might of the strong man's love. I knew how when she was restless at night he would walk up and down with her in his arms, hour after hour. When I had stayed with him then, at the time which with its security and calm and quiet seemed so far away now, we used to pass many hours, he and I and the child, Edith busy with domestic work, under the big trees in the wide shade of which a large carpet had been put down; and as, reclining, I read or smoked, I would watch the two. Now he would put down a rug and provision it for a long voyage; it was a ship; and he and she would embark on it; and float away down a great river, past mighty forests and great castles and cities, and he would tell her strange things about them, and they would have adventures, his fancy never flagged, and I marvelled at the love which could so stir the fancy in a mind that was not poetical. Or the table and chairs belonging to her doll's-house were brought out, and her tea-set, and the dolls, and there was a tea-party, at which Septimus was an honoured guest, and he made the dollies drink the milk, which was tea, and which she poured out into the tiny tea-cups from the minute tea-pot, and he tossed off his own—how small the cup in his thick fingers, and against his big lips!—with infinite gusto.

"You will take some of the sago if daddy makes it for you, won't you, darling?"

"Yes."

And soon he was bending over the hot fire in the hot verandah making it for her.

We dug three graves. A small hole for the two babies that had died. One for poor Hardy. The other for the coward; we laid him separate and apart.

When darkness had cast her mantle over the Fort I came down and sat with Mary, relieving her of the task of pulling the punkah over the children, which she and the other two ladies took by turns—a wearying, monotonous task. I insisted on relieving her of it almost wholly this evening, for it seemed to me that she had been overdoing herself by her unceasing ministering; ministering under such terrible circumstances.

I had determined to pass the night upon the bastion beneath which the enemy lay so close. I slept in it by myself, the other men sleeping on the wall on either side. It was not the hardness of the lying that made my sleep broken, but anxiousness, even though I had set a double watch. I awake, I look up. It is one of the moments that imprint themselves. The sky covered with innumerable bright stars burst on my new-opened eyes in a sudden blaze of glory, a momentary majestic spectacle, a breath of the now cooler air, I am asleep again. I awake; the wail of a child below, the sudden fierce yelling of jackals, the answering fierce barking of dogs in the village; I fall asleep again. I awake; there is a deep silence; it is the meeting-time of night and morning, when the night sounds have ceased, the day sounds not begun; the cool time when sleep is deepest; no sound in the fort below, no sound without. But there is a sound. I catch it. Not within, not without. Where? I lay my ear to the masonry below me, and listen. A sound coming up through the solid bastion. I leap up. They are driving a mine under it; fool, that was the meaning of the earthen bank that had been rising all day long in that infernally placed godown close below; we should have been driving a countermine; no, we could not have driven a countermine; we should have sallied out during the night and attacked the godown; no, with the enemy in such large numbers in it, and so securely barricaded, that would have been too dangerous. But now to face the immediate.

CHAPTER XXXIX

EXPLOSION OF THE MINE

WE arouse and call together all the men. We see that we have plenty of loaded muskets ready in the vicinity of the bastion. We place barriers across the top of the ramps nearest the bastion, barriers across the walls.

The grey dawn is breaking.

The two guns in the mango grove open fire on the mid-east bastion: both of them, neither fires on the corner bastion: the reason obvious: the gun in the first one bears on the open space between the dismantled warehouse and the corner bastion, the space a storming party has to traverse: they mean to silence its fire, at all events render it unsteady. The round shot whizz overhead, crash against the masonry below the breastwork we had built up, strike the breastwork, shatter and shake it, send its splinters flying into the air. This goes on for some time. Then, as on the occasion of the last attack, a body of infantry advances into the fields before the mango grove, another and larger body advances into the fields between the village and the menaced corner bastion, extends itself under cover.

The day brightens.

A dull, low roar: a rattling sound like that of the dragging down of pebbles on the seashore: a sudden darkness: a cloud of smoke and pulverised mortar: the mine has been discharged. The wall rocks beneath us. A sudden shock, a sense of stupefaction. The sound of the falling of the fragments of masonry all about us. Then a clearness: the black cloud of smoke goes upward, the white cloud of pulverised mortar downward. Now the end of the bastion presents to the godown not a perpendicular face, but a slope, a practicable breach. A yell from the close-gathered enemy

there at sight of it. The rattle of musketry from the fields, the quicker firing of the guns in the grove. The stormers rush out and make for the breach. A dozen of us rush forward and meet them at the top. There the combat rages. A hand-to-hand fight. We meet them with sword and bayonet and clubbed musket. Their foremost men are fierce, active swordsmen: professional swordsmen and athletes: desperadoes: men who have attacked many a band of travellers, raided many a fortified dwelling, engaged in many a fray and foray. Many of our men have been accustomed to the use of no weapon but the goose-quill. We give way; we are borne back. "Come on!" roars Septimus, in his bull voice. We bear them back. The combat rages. Backwards and forwards sways the fight over the narrow remaining top of the bastion. Thrust and slash and parry: wounds and death. We have the advantage of position. We are sheltered from the near fire of the men in the godown by our opponents. The bullets from the more distant fire of the men in the fields sing continuously over our heads, but the fire is too quick to be accurate. They have the disadvantage of the steep slope, of the clear exposure on the slope. Our men have run back along the south wall to points from which the upward striving throng presents itself to them clear, sideways. Picking up the ready-loaded muskets, they pour a close continuous deadly fire into the throng. The men who have their own rifles have to stop to reload, but they are accustomed to do that quickly, and their aim is deadly. Baggs and those with him at his gun are in the midst of a drive of bullets and round shot and flying splinters, but he lays his gun calmly, coolly, steadily. He cannot get on to the slope because of the round of the bastion, but he makes a death zone at its foot which the supporters hesitate to cross.

We had stemmed the first rush. Every minute that we held back the column was in our favour. It was sustaining loss: it was losing the spirit of progression: next must come retrogression.

It has come, the critical moment in every fight, the moment of giving way on one side or the other. A stand in the assaulting column, a backward sinking. Our front rank shows with bayonets. "Charge!" I cry, and we dash at them. They give way before the serried points. The impulse is the other

way now. They struggle down the slope, they rush back to the godown. That operation and attack, too, has been foiled.

We hurry up a couple of little three-pounders from the armoury, and loading them to the muzzle, plant them at the top of the breach, pointing down the slope.

How strange the sudden and deep silence!

We had a great number of men wounded, some dangerously, but only two deaths. One of these, however, counted for many. It was that of Mr. Baggs. He had been killed by almost the last shot fired, died at the very moment of the success toward the attaining of which he had contributed so largely. He was a great loss. Not only because he was the best of our trained artillerymen. But his fine presence, his calm, smooth, cool manner, never varying, not in the hottest of the fight, had been a great sustaining force.

The period of relaxing reaction. The period of recovery from the fierce fury and excitement of the fight, from the great physical exertion—there were men whose shoulders were severely bruised, whose arms trembled from the continual discharge of the muskets. A period of such fond, tender welcome and tending from the loved ones for whom we fought. And this was not a moment for convention, and Mary displayed her feelings toward me as openly as did the two wives in our household toward their husbands: and were we not betrothed, our spirits one for ever? Yea; so it was.

Then, after that, I am asked to call a general meeting to consider whether we should try and hold out longer in the Fort or try and make our way down the river. Septimus is strongly, passionately against the latter course; points out the dangers: the slow movement, the grounding, the passing close under banks from which we may be fired on. The floods are now due in the river, and the rise in it of a few feet even, would make all the difference. On the other hand is urged the breach in our defences: our greatly reduced strength, not only in numbers but condition; the danger of a further reduction of that strength by illness, the exposure to the sun on the walls was dangerous, the atmosphere below was growing pestilential; and, with reference to this, there were none of the sick now who could not, without whatsoever difficulty or pain, crawl down to the river, but what if we

should have many, and there were quickly-prostrating diseases rife, who could not move? How could we leave them? We had lost our best artilleryman. Baggs was killed. "And," says a man, "there is one argument in favour of the river which with us quite outweighs all the arguments against it." "What is that?" says Septimus. "The river can drown. We and our families need not fall into the hands of the enemy: the river can pass us into the hands of God."

We determined to evacuate the Fort that night.

Mr. Van Zeest, an East Indian gentleman engaged in commercial pursuits and long resident in the place, undertook to go out in disguise, after dark, and make his way to the "boat village," situated about a mile above us (he could get to it along the quiet solitary river bank) and arrange for the boats. He was well known to a boat-master, with whom he had large transactions in connection with his shipment of goods down the river. He could ensure the attendance and fidelity of the boatmen by his personal influence, the offer of a large reward. He was to arrange for three boats to be brought down to the ghaut, of which mention has been made in connection with the burning woodstacks.

We should not have far to go. But it would be all in the open. We must pass out of the gateway; the godown, in occupation of the enemy, lay not far from it. With so many women and children, sick and wounded, the transference involved a terrible danger, formed a critical and hazardous operation. It must be worked out carefully beforehand. I put it all down on paper: arranged the place of every person; who was to walk by the side of whom, who was to support this sick person, carry this or that child.

Nor because of our proposed departure did we intermit any of the arrangements we should have made for our defence in case we had been remaining: carried them out with redoubled vigour: we may not be able to make that departure, the enemy must have no suspicion that we intend it. We worked hard, we exposed ourselves to risks, as in the drawing of chains across the top of the breach, repairing damaged breastworks, and so on.

Mr. Van Zeest went out and came back. Three boats were to be ready for us. We were to leave two hours after midnight.

CHAPTER XL

THE EVACUATION

AT midnight we began the arrangements for the move. No one was to take anything except what they could dispose of about their persons. We went round to see that this order, which many had objected to, was not evaded. The time has come. With a beating heart I give the order to fall in.

The retreating column is drawn up in the open space just within the gateway, in double file, and in exact accordance with the details worked out beforehand. The gate is half opened. Four of us, who are to form the rearguard, move out and take our stand by its side. The fateful movement has begun. One of the foremost couple is a non-commissioned officer who knows every inch of the way. They file out before us, couple after couple. We have taken our stand to the left of the gateway, the enemy-filled, dismantled godown lies behind us. The couples wheel sharp to the right; move from the gateway to the south-west corner bastion, half the length of the south face; round that bastion, then along the whole length of the west front down to the ghaut, lying a little above the north-west corner bastion. The distance is not very great. It is all easy going over the open, level plain; there are no impediments. The danger lies in the enemy becoming aware of our movement before we have got into the boats. While our eyes are fixed on the ghostly column, moving past us in the quiet starlight, our ears are strained to catch any sound behind us. Horror! a baby wails—there—some way down the line. How the little cry seems to fill the stillness! But now it has passed round the bastion. Deep silence here again. All out. With quivering hearts we too step forward—very terrible was

that standing still. Round the bastion all. Now we have the whole width of the Fort between us and the enemy. Now if the children cry, as cry they do, it will sound, to that enemy, as if it came from within the Fort, an accustomed sound. Slowly, but steadily, we leave a longer length of road vacant behind us. There is no hitch, no stoppage. We had feared the latter: there were many of the sick and wounded who could hardly walk; but the excitement bore them up. Owing to this, the clear open road, the good guidance, the careful arrangements—the soul of success in anything—we have the satisfaction, when we reach the boats, to find all the people, except those immediately in front of us, in them. Septimus and I are the two last to step in, as we had formed the rear of the column.

We have put off. We are floating down the stream. We must not begin to use the oars until we have left the Fort and the village of Kotra well behind us. An outlying hamlet of that village extends along the water's edge. We have to pass close by it. We are coming to it. Some children wail and cry. "D——n them!" says a man. The damned-soul howling of a pack of jackals, the fierce barking of dogs. Howl, jackal! Bark, dog! We have passed it by. A long, straight reach along which the stream hugs the hither, the Doâb, bank of the valley of the river, which but a short time before was our English bank, while the opposite one, the Oudh bank, was foreign territory; then the stream leaves it, and makes across the shallow trough or valley for that opposite shore. Now we have around us nothing but the grey sand, the dry morass, and the tamarisk brake, which, with the bed of the stream, make up the width of the valley, a wild, desolate stretch. We ply the oars. The stream runs across the valley in a long, curving course. It strikes the opposite, the Oudh, bank; keeps along under it; leaves it to make again for the other, the Doâb, bank; such alternate crossing and recrossing of its valley being the wont of the river at this season of the year. We are back at the shore from which we had started. And there—horrid sight!—is the Fort. They who have been down Jumna or Ganges at the period of low water will remember how near some conspicuous object, fort or temple, has shown again after long dropping down from it. The clear early-morning bright-

ness is now upon the land. Our progress could not but be slow with the heavy barges, and it has been much impeded in places by shoals and shallows. In this clear light the Fort looks nearer than it really is. But there it stands. Our progress has been along the curve of a section of a circle. Movement along the chord has been open to our enemies. A village on the shore. The leading boat has passed it. The second, ours, is opposite it. We are looking at it from mid-stream. The bathing-place seems very crowded for so early an hour. From the side of a grove flash out jets of flame; the crackle of musketry; bullets splashing all about us. "Oh!" A groan. A woman sinks down wounded. "Keep seated! keep seated!" I shout to Mary—the whole of our party is together in this boat—who has risen to go to the woman's help. "Pull!" I shout to the rowers; and pull they do, for are not they too under fire? The enemy fire at us again; but we are now away, and end on. The third boat, which lags behind because of the additional weight of a thatched roof in her centre, gets the full benefit of the next volley, but the roof gives protection. She too has got by. A roar; a round-shot hisses over us.

"Lucky they had not the gun placed in time," says Septimus. "They might have sunk us as we went by." Two more discharges and then the gun gives up the long shooting. But horsemen gallop along the bank and take shots at us with their carbines when they can get near to the edge. But the present winding character of the stream that had brought us into the difficulty takes us out of it. The stream now leaves this bank to make for the opposite.

This cross-valley channel is much impeded with shoals and shallows. In the course of this passage from high bank to high bank we experience much delay and difficulty—maddening, infuriating delay and difficulty. "Oh for one more foot of water!" cries Septimus, as we touch and ground. The danger is lest a boat run into a quicksand on to which the people could not land to lighten her, from whose close-holding ooze it might be impossible to withdraw her. Some of these sandbanks have been known to swallow up horse and rider. As those here disappear and re-form each year the boatmen are not always acquainted with their position or extent. Now

our foremost boat has come to a standstill—stuck. We go to her help. We have to jump into the water before we can get her off. However, here is the end of that bad cross run; we have once more reached the high bank, along which if the stream is narrower and likely to bring us close under the fire of a fortress or a body of foes on the bank, it is faster, deeper, unimpeded. And the swifter stream enlivens our spirits—we are getting away. But there, yonder, is the end of this good under-bank reach; there where a village crowns the clay cliff, where the stream does not curve gently away from the bank, but seems to rush away from it at right angles, there where the heavy boat with the thatched roof, which had passed the other two by when delayed, as noted above, shows stationary.

"Why have they put to here?" says Septimus. "So soon?"

"To get something from the village," says a man. "Perhaps milk."

"We ought not to stop for another three hours," says Septimus. "We have not got so far away yet."

But when we approach the bend we see that the stoppage is not voluntary but involuntary. All the men are in the water striving to push her off. They shout to us to come to their help. We lay the other two boats by the river bank a little lower down and go up to render it. But all our joint efforts are unavailing. We land the women and children to lighten her. But still we cannot move her.

"The d——d fool steered straight at the bank," cries a man passionately. But the boat was unwieldy, the turn sharp.

Now all together, with hand and shoulder and back and pole. But she stirs not. The men were in a weakened condition, half of them wounded.

We might have got her off in time, but now there is a change of circumstance.

On the little beach below the village appears a group of villagers. We call out to them to come and help us. They reply with jeering cries and foul abuse. They are inimical. Most of them are armed with sword or spear or the lethal club. Our men, those belonging to the stranded boat, jump into her and get their muskets or rifles. "They are loaded

with bullets," one of our boatmen calls out to the villagers. They retire hastily up the bank. Now every man to the work with fullest effort of will and nerve and muscle. But we cannot release her from the oozy grip: it has tightened. Crack, crack, two matchlock shots from a mass of bushes on the crest of the bank by the side of the village. They have firearms. Our men reply, firing into the bushes; they cannot see the matchlockmen. Shrieks and cries from the group of landed women and children, standing out in the open, so close under range of the bank. There is the danger. The matchlockmen have been firing at us men by the boat: they may turn their fire on that broad mark. We cannot reinstall the women and children under cover of the thatched roof of the boat, for then we could not move her. We have the superiority in weapons and marksmanship, but we are in the open, they under cover. If we engage in the contest we cannot be moving the boat. There is but one thing to be done. We must abandon the boat. The word is passed. We open a sharp, quick, deterring fusillade on the bushes while the women and children are taken down to the other two boats and placed in them. We retire to them too, jump in, and push off. We keep up a fire from our boat, the hinder one, and they drop the shot about us, but now the last sharp crack of the rifle and feebler detonation of the matchlock has been exchanged.

"We shall not get on so fast now, with so many more people in the boat," said a man in our vessel.

"Oh yes," said Septimus cheerfully; "not as fast as we *could* have gone before, but as fast as we *should* have gone. We could not have parted from the thatched boat; she set the pace."

"Oh for another foot of water!" said Septimus, as he came and seated himself by my side.

"Where is Mary?" I say.

"Somewhere in the boat."

"I do not see her."

"No more do I," he says, as he looks down the boat—he had been surveying the stream.

I go to inquire of the others of our party.

"She is in the other boat," says Maud Alexander. "She

went to help some children into it. She carried one of them into it in her arms, and just then the boat pushed off."

I like not the separation. My eyes run down the stream toward the other boat.

"How far that boat has got ahead of us!" I say to Septimus, as I go and reseat myself by his side.

"She shoved off before us."

"She must be more lightly laden, too. She has more the speed of us than before—she is getting away from us."

"She seems to be."

"She is. We must have taken in more people; they rushed into the boats hurriedly."

"They did."

"We must make a better distribution the first place we land at."

"We need take only one person in here in order to make the adjustment satisfactory, eh?" said Septimus, with a laugh.

"I do not like the separation," I say gravely.

I do not like to see the boat disappear from view as it does now. For this present channel is not like the preceding ones. The stream does not run right across the valley as before; it makes a sharp bend in the middle, owing to the block of a dense growth of tamarisk, and turns again toward the bank we have just left.

The boat ahead, the boat which carries her, has gone round the corner and disappeared from our view. I like it not. The time has made one fearful.

And now to all does the disappearance of the boat ahead become painful, a matter of moment. A sudden shock; a violent shock. Our own boat has, in her turn, struck, owing no doubt to her being now so much more heavily laden than before.

CHAPTER XLI

THE FATAL ISLET

THE boat has struck the shelving end of a long, narrow sandbank. An experience similar to the one we had gone through so short a time before; the same efforts, the same failure. We try to pole her off. We jump down into the water and try to push her off. We land the women and children and try to push her off. Our efforts not so frantic and frenzied as they were then, when some men had burst their wounds; but made with all our strength, with all our might and soul. For though we are not under fire from a near height, have no band of armed foemen ready to rush down upon us, we are in a perilous position, stranded here in the midst of the stream. Our situation must soon become known. The enemy may send down boats to attempt to attack us. We must remain as we are. No rise of tide to take us off. The other boat is out of sight, knows not of our plight.

"If we fired some shots it might bring them back."

"They would have to tow up against the stream."

"The firing would make our situation known to all the people near."

We cannot move the boat.

"This is not a time of much traffic," says the boat-master, "but some empty boats may be returning down the river; we may get one to come to our help. Otherwise the only thing to be done will be for me to swim ashore and go up for one."

"You could get one?"

"I think so, but it would take time."

"A boat, a boat!" cries a man.

"Where?"

"There, coming down-stream."

So there is. All eyes are turned towards her. We cannot tell, yet, what her size or character, how manned. I get the telescope I had brought with me and laid down in the bottom of the boat.

"A big boat like our own," I say.

Most were of that barge-like character.

"Has a small mat pent-roof in the middle," I say.

"Covering sugar or salt," says one man.

"How many men in her?" asks another

"Three; two men at the oars, one steering," I reply.

"We must get her to come to us," says Tom Jackson.

"They may not stop," says Mr. Carwithen.

"They must," says someone else.

"Tell the boat-master to call out to them that we will pay them well if they will come to our help; and that we do not wish to take them away from their work; only want them to carry us down to the first place where we can get a boat," says Septimus.

"We had better signal to her before she comes within speaking distance. If they go by us they may not care to make their way up-stream again—may not be able to," I say.

We signal to her. She shapes her course toward us at once. The steersman was, as usual, standing up against the heavy rudder beam, saw the signal. Splash, splash come the sound of her oars. They bring her round and run her in close alongside our boat, the two sides touching.

We are all standing in lines and groups, some on the islet, some in the water, along the other side.

The edge of the little light triangle of matting is lifted up. The muzzles of a dozen muskets protrude in a level line from under it. A deadly fire is poured into us. Our men go down before it like the armful of corn before the sweep of the scythe. The light matting is lifted up on their shoulders as they rise up: they leap into our boat. Our arms lie there. All is lost.

I and someone else have leaped on to the bow of the boat to get our guns. We have to leap back again. All is over: all is lost. The surprise has been most successful, most terrible and complete.

The women and children have been standing a little way up the slope of the sandbank. With wild shrieks and cries they now rush up to its top and take their stand there, looking back for husband, father, son. We who have survived rush up toward them. A volley into the compact mass. Women and children fall. The doomed victims huddle closer together. Shot after shot into the midst of them. Shot after shot, and they fall—man, woman, child—before our eyes; a terrible sight; an awful spectacle. What sounds for the ears! What piercing cries! What shrieks of agony and dread! "Oh Christ!" "Oh my God!" The shrieking out of names—name of husband; name of child. Terrible screams, calls, and exclamations. The mad, wild, fearful tones of some of the voices! And what sights for the eyes! Women, girls whose flush and bloom of life had withstood the trials of the past time in the Fort, children, lying extended on the sand, dead or wounded. Wounded children crawling about. Women, shrieking women, seeing their children writhing in agony at their feet. I cast my eyes about wildly, looking for those of my party, move about wildly searching for them, my feet avoiding the fallen.

The tragedy deepens. The men leap out of the boat armed with spear and sword and club. They rush up the bank—with shouts and yells and laughter. They see we are defenceless. They haste to the revelry of blood. The distant slaying does not give full delight. They wish the hand to feel the blow. The sandbank becomes a shambles.

The miserable throng separates, scatters. They rush to the far end of the islet, the arena of this awful tragedy, rush down its sides. Families move together in miserable close-huddled groups. With the men the cry is "Down to the water!" They get down to the water. The fiends pursue them. They wade out into it. The pursuers wade in after them, slash at them with their swords, thrust at them with their spears. They go on and on until comes the sudden deep water and they sink and are swept away by the stream. Then the men who have muskets fire at them floating, or attempting to swim, away.

It was a maddening, sickening, infuriating spectacle. Upon the sand lay ghastly witness of the work of sword or club. And one was empty-handed, helpless—helpless when

the shrieks of agony and fear rang in one's ears, one saw the woman or child running, the man pursuing. One fought. One fought with hand and fist. The miserable wretch lifts up his club, a child before him; a white-faced man leaps at him from the side, bears him to the ground, clutches him so fiercely by the throat as to squeeze the life out of him, ere he is killed himself by a spear-thrust and dead falls on dead.

"Now!" I cried as I snatched his spear out of the hand of a man; but the next moment it is wrested out of my own hand by another, and I have to run. One intervened. One procured brief respite.

The seething tragedy and the single sights that burnt themselves into the brain. Dreadful sights in any case, more so in case of some loved woman or child. I sought my friends, but with fearfulness; I sicken at the thought of what I may see. Now I thanked God for the separation I had lamented. She is not here.

Things catch one's eye this way and that. The handsome East Indian girl who had helped Mary rushing away; men pursuing her and shouting to her that they do not mean to hurt her; she rushing away the faster and dashing into the water, through it splash, splash, until she has reached a whirling eddy and been carried away in its close embrace. Things catch the eye for a brief moment which at another time would have held it horrified. Poor Carwithen, the jovial indigo planter, Septimus's great friend, lying dead on his back. But he is a man: the women, the children.

I have not yet found any one of our party. But there had been a crowd: there had been wild confusion: a mad rushing about: a swaying this way and that: obstructions: deviations: wild appeals for help and the rendering of it: interpositions: dodgings for life: a rush forwards: a rush back: a struggle: an escape.

But now the crowd has vanished. Most of the bank is vacant except of the dying and the dead. The remaining scenes of the dread drama are being enacted along the water's edge. Family groups of our poor people wading out and out into the water, out from before sword or spear: the poor mother with her infant in her arms, the father with a child—there with two children—in his arms: hesitating at the brink

of the soon-reached deep water: children swept away: father or mother dropped by a shot: enough.

Suddenly I have two pictures in my brain. Tom Jackson and his wife, out there by themselves in the water, she leaning upon him and looking up to him, he holding her and looking down on her—as I had seen them in their pretty drawing-room. A momentary sight, and I have to run, to dash into the water. To me it affords the means of escape. But I swim back and re-land at another spot. I have got near to the end of the sandbank and am looking about when I espy them. There they are—Maud Alexander and her boy, Septimus and his wife and child—out there, waist deep in the water; the boy has his arms clasped round his mother's neck; the girl has her arms clasped round her father's neck; Septimus is bare-headed. Cries behind me; a shouting from the boats, from the looking-on boatmen: the water rolls up the side of the sandbank: the colour of the river has changed from yellow to milk-white: I know the sign: a Himalayan flood down the river. Good God, if it had but come such a little while before! Good God ever. It has come to sweep away the dread hesitancy, brings the mercy of a quicker release. I turn my head again to look for the group. It is gone. I run down to the end of the sandbank. Nothing shows on the surface of the stream. As I stand in a daze of horror and grief I feel a sudden blow, I fall forward on my hands and knees. I scramble up. There is nothing near. I have been struck by a bullet. I see a man running toward me, sword in hand. I dash out into the water and swim away. I was a powerful swimmer and was close behind the foam-bordered, careering flood edge. I am soon far away from the fatal islet, round the corner, out of sight of it.

I strike out strong. Where has the other boat got to? Will not this flood water take her fast down the river? I have to ease my stroke because of the pain in my shoulder. I float along on my back. Rested, I strike out again. Suddenly I experience a loss of all vital power and feel as if I were about to sink. I was a powerful swimmer; the distance I had come was nothing to what I could do; I had swum for much longer periods of time, in heavier water, in surf. I was overpowered by a sudden swooning sensation by

reason of the recollection of that last sight I had seen. I must make for the shore, for the shallow. I am revived by a sudden gust of cool, fresh air. The brightness about me is darkened by the shadow of a cloud. I see passing by me one of those large gourds the natives use to support them in a long swim. I seize it and put it under me. What is this on the surface of the water? I shudder. One of their bodies? A native crossing the river on a gourd. I pass close before him: he looks at me, I look at him. The stream has reached the end of that fatal curve, reached the high bank, the Oudh bank. I float along under it. What is that ahead? A boat moored under the bank. Is it the boat? I shout as I come down near her. An answering shout, a shout from English lips. I am pulled into her.

CHAPTER XLII

VARYING EMOTIONS

I SANK upon a seat, and clasping my hands over my eyes was overcome by a fit of weeping. A hand was laid on my hands. I knew its touch. I looked up. It was Mary. I experienced a strong revulsion of feeling. It is at such times that you experience emotions in a strength of which you had never thought them capable; which makes their ordinary play in the near succeeding years seem so poor; makes those years seem feelingless. Let a man recall the emotions of his first battle: of anxiety, of horror, of apprehension, of fierce determination, of unthinking courage, of thought of self, of all loss of thought of self; the zenith height of the joy of victory, the nadir depth of the sorrow of defeat. Then you experience the undreamt of heights and depths, heat and brightness, cold and darkness, of feeling. The cold and darkness had been upon me; now came the heat and brightness. And at such periods there is quick alternation of feeling; the fiercer the stroke the sharper the rebound; the stronger an emotion, the stronger its opposite that obliterates it, for the moment, that takes its place. Her face is to me as light in the darkness, the clear shining forth again of the sun after black eclipse, life-giving warmth after death-dealing cold.

"Oh, my master! My support and sustenance! My life-sustainer, and God has preserved his life! All praise to Sir God!" and Bhola Ram has bent down and touched my feet.

They crowd toward me. I tell them what has happened, briefly, quickly, in broken accents. Around me eyes wide with horror, set eyes, sad eyes, streaming eyes. But brief time for the past when the present and the future press so close. Men look around on their families.

"We put to. We could not go back. Shall we wait any longer?"

"Those devils' boat may be coming down after us."

"Even if it cannot take us it may do great harm by firing into us. A running fight would be all against us."

"There may be others of our people swimming down the river."

I did not think that likely, except in the case of Septimus, as strong a swimmer as I, and he would not separate from the child.

"I do not think so. I came down the river as I wished to overtake the boat," and I glanced at Mary. "The less strong swimmers would make for the shore." This was the case, as I learnt afterwards, with the one other man who escaped, or lived on to tell of his escape, from that butchery.

"We would wait if we were by ourselves. We have our families," several men say.

We put off.

When we get away from the bank we feel the breeze of which I had got that refreshing mouthful. It is blowing more strong and steady. Oh, the refreshment of it! Our attention is engaged by a natural phenomenon, always of moment in that clime, and of special concern to us just now, voyaging on the river. "We are in for a nor'-wester," says a man when the high bank no longer obstructs our view that way. It is one of the storm quarters. In that part of India the wind blows from west or east, nor'-west or nor'-east; not once in twenty years from southward. There, in that quarter of the sky, hangs the dark cloud mass. A larger cloud comes over us than the one that had overshadowed me. It rains. We mind not the drenching. A breeze, a cool breeze, moisture in the air, a shadow, a hiding of the sun—what delights! It is not a heavy shower, the cloud is but the precursor of the great storm mass. But what a change, what a difference! It is like the releasing of a tight band round the head, the getting away from under some heavy, suffocating, superincumbent mass. The reinvigorating of our frames cannot but affect our spirits. And with the rise in the stream, the flood roll, the boat, her greater load notwithstanding, moves down it faster than we had moved yet; great exhilaration in that!

And with her by my side contending emotions arise within me. Within my heart conflicting light and darkness, as now in the land around. Within my heart dark sorrow and regret, bright joy and hope. I may feel shame of the joy and hope, but they will arise. Terrible loss: infinite gain: they struggle within me: the dead and the living, the lost and the found.

We have not been pursued, we have got a good distance away from Rahun, we determine to stop at some village and get milk for the children, fresh food, water—we like not to drink of the river. We ask of the boat-master if we may put to at the next village.

"No, not at that one: at the one beyond." For it, he says, is inhabited chiefly by people of his own class, boatmen and fishermen; men more interested in the things of the river than of the land above, more concerned in the rise and fall of the stream than in the rise and fall of dynasties.

It is a long beyond.

"All lost?" asks Mary, in low tone charged with grief.

"I am afraid so. I saw them all far out in the water. Jackson and his wife were in one place. The others were all together in another. I saw them last. Then I was struck down by the bullet."

"Struck down by the bullet! You have not been wounded again?"

"Yes; on the shoulder: the bullet has gone through, I think." And it was so: through the fleshy part.

"It ought to be bound up. I will bind it up."

"We'll wait until we get to the village. I saw them all together, far out in the water, Maud and Septimus holding the children. When I rose up again there was no sight of them; the flood water had come down. That must be the village where we are to land: the one beyond he spoke of."

We put to a little above the village by the side of a fine, wide-spreading mango grove. While Bhola Ram and the boatmen go to procure us the things we want, we scatter among the trees. Mary and I move down one of the shady aisles to its farthest end. We take our stand beneath an overshadowing tree, with huge gnarled roots, and mighty buttressed stem, and wide spread of its low level-growing branches, and dense canopy of leaves, and she dresses my

wound. And I took her in my arms, and our lips met. I held her closer to me. Our love became all in all. It was fanned to utmost height by the circumstances of the hour, purified by them of all dross. It absorbed our being. We were rapt away from the present, sense killed by passion. Sorrow passed without our putting it by. One warmth enveloped us. The fountains of our lives became confused in our passion's golden purity. We stood concentred in a wide circumference of bliss. About us was the faintness of a deep, speechless swoon of joy. The beating of our pulses made a sudden stillness, harmonising silence without a sound. About us that deep hidden music that is a soul within the soul. How tell of such a speechless moment, that confounded all thought, all sense, all feeling? She breathed a voiceless sigh, felt in my blood. I hold her close. Our hearts beat together. Upon me fell the shadow of a golden dream, the image of a bright eternity. Words, poor words! The most passionate words of the most passionate writer but poor.

As we were walking back I addressed her.

"I cannot speak about it much on this dreadful day—after what has happened—but because of that I must say to you now that you must make your home with me at once—as soon as may be."

Because of the breeze the boat-master had procured a mast and sail. The mast is fixed, the sail set. We are sailing down the river. How delightful the quick movement, the assured forward movement! The trees and bushes on the banks, fresh washed, refreshed, look bright and gay. What joy in the quick fresh breeze after the dead stagnant atmosphere of so many a day! What double joy in the quickened flow of the river. The great herds of cattle feeding on either side of the stream in the mid parts of the valley bellow, the lads keeping them shout their delight at the change. What a joyousness above in the drift of big white or brown-tinged clouds, breaking the usual dull uniformity of the sky, tempering the golden sunshine, casting down delightful shadows—oh, the dread procession of those past cloudless days!—while between them the usually dull-hued vault of heaven shows of a rapturous blue. A joyous day, a prime

day, a day of deep delight but for what has happened. And all have not suffered near losses. They mourn for the others sincerely: they rejoice for themselves sincerely. They have escaped, they and theirs. Their nearest and dearest are with them here. Upon them the rapture of freedom; the delight of the bird set free; the overpowering joy of deliverance and escape. Faces show brighter than they had done for many a day. And bright faces make bright faces, as sad faces make sad faces, as seen too plainly in the Fort. And the pure, cool, fresh air was most reviving to the sick and wounded. To the children it was elixir. I had remarked into what deep sleep poor Elsie and Philip had fallen as we dropped down the river at early dawn. The faces of most of the children here now began to show bright and gay, and in the boat was heard the joyous sound of their laughter.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE END

IT became even more beautiful and delightful in the late afternoon. The declining sun sent his level rays in golden radiance over the land. The middle of the valley of the river exhibits, as we cross it, but a dreary waste. But along either side of it the high bank, clothed with trees and shrubs and with the broad shining stream below, often presents a long fine view, often made the more picturesque by ghauts and temples at its foot, village or fortress on its summit. The face of the bank is diversified by the frequent appearance of the narrow or wide mouths of tree-filled ravines. We are approaching such an opening in the middle of a most beautiful curving reach; how sweet the sweep, how thickly clad the bank, how clearly reflected in the water below! In front of the opening lies, as usual, a stretch of level green sward. On this a hunting party: men on foot, dogs in leash, a man on horseback, a pad elephant. What a picture it makes in itself! how it enhances the picturesqueness of the whole scene! Now we have come opposite. On the elephant, on the front part of the pad sits a stout man, whose dress proclaims his rank: he has a gun in his hand: behind him sits an attendant holding another gun. As we are going by we hear one of the men on foot call out, "English people." We have gone by. I am looking back; I was seated in the stern of the boat. I am fond of looking at such real pictures. How well the hunting party befits the place, how exactly it fits in! A flash, a report, the crack of a rifle, I know the sound. A sudden commotion in the boat; shrieks and cries and exclamations. "What is it?" "Someone hit?" "Who is it?" "God Almighty!" I rise up and look down the boat. "Who is it?" I ask. Others have risen up too.

They are in front of me. Beyond them sobbing exclamations of sorrow and distress. "The dear, kind, good lady." "The poor young lady." "Who is it?" asks one of the men in front of me. "Miss Alexander." "Miss Alexander!" I exclaim. "Let me pass." They make way for me. They all knew what was between us. Her head is lying on the breast of the woman by whose side she had been seated; they are removing from her lap the child still lying asleep upon it, to put whom to sleep upon it she had sat down here. I look down on the deadly-pale face. "She is not dead?" I cry. "No, no, sir," says the woman supporting her, "but very badly hurt, the poor, dear, good, kind young lady." She puts her hand over the side of the boat, and dipping her handkerchief in the water bathes her head and face. But no sign of returning animation. The head with its terrible bend lies quite still. She bathes her forehead, moistens her lips. But still the terrible bend of the head, the terrible relaxation of the frame, the straight down hanging hand and arm. "Mortal, I am afraid," I hear a man say behind me. "Please go away and sit down, everyone," says the woman. "She wants all the air she can get."

I bend down and take her hand; I hear her sigh. "She is not dead." "No, sir, no." "Sahib!" my bearer whispers from behind. I release her dear sweet hand. "Sahib! Sahib!" "What do you want? What is it?" I cry, turning round in a fury, the fury of distress. "Sahib," said the old man, with the tears running down his cheeks, "the boatman says that in the village we are coming to now there is no fear for us, and there is there a famous hukeem who could attend to the young lady. Cursed be the heart that harboured that thought, God wither the hand that fired the shot." "There is the village; we will land there," say the men.

The boat is laid by the side of the bank a little above the village. "Carry her to that garden," says the boat-master, pointing to it. "She can be accommodated there with a room and a bed." "Will they let us in?" says a man. It was a walled garden. "Yes, the owner of it, who lives at Allahabad, is in the Government employ, a good post; the gardener in charge will let you in, do everything for you. Carry her on this mat." Plenty of willing hands; men press

forward eager to help, sick men, wounded men whom she had nursed and tended. Others run forward to get ready the bed. We carry her in. "This way; a good soft bed." They have placed a sheet and pillows upon it. We lay her gently down. "The hukeem," I say to the boat-master. "I go for him at once." I stand at the door of the room, my teeth set fast. It was a garden chiefly of fruit trees, with rooms all round it, the country seat of its owner. "We may as well remain here for the night," say the men. "There is room for us all, and we shall want shelter to-night, the storm will be upon us soon." I stand there in a mad impatience. The boat-master. "The hukeem is not here, sir." "Not here?" "No; he has gone to a neighbouring village, but will be back anon." "Will he come here at once?" "At once; without putting off of shoe." There is a silence in the empty rooms and garden, all the others having gone back to the boat; a terrible silence in the room behind me. The sound of rapid footsteps. Not the hukeem. Three or four of my fellow-passengers. They come up to me hurriedly. "We cannot remain here, Captain. We must carry the young lady back to the boat. We have to leave at once. A party of sepoys just arrived here; halted at the village guest-house—halting for the night. We must put off at once before they become aware of our presence here."

"The hukeem has not come yet."

"We cannot wait for him. The guest-house is at the other side of the village, but they will be told at once of our being here, and will rush down upon us. We have come to carry the young lady down."

"I must wait for the hukeem. I cannot deprive her of this chance."

"Every moment is dangerous. We may be cut off. They may get hold of the boat; fire a volley into her. Remember what you saw."

"The hukeem may be on his way here now."

"So may the sepoys."

Other hurried footsteps. Two more men appear.

"Are you not enough to carry her?"

"Captain Hayman wishes to wait for the hukeem."

"We cannot do that. There is not a moment to lose. The

others are all in the boat. We must carry her down at once. Where is she? In there?"

"I cannot allow Miss Alexander to be moved until the hukeem has seen her."

"He cannot do her any good."

There is not much belief in the skill of these men among English people.

"I have heard that some of these hukeems are very skilful men," I say.

"That is not it, Captain. The poor young lady is mortally wounded. No one can do her any good now."

"She may not be mortally wounded. He may do her good. She must remain here until he comes."

"But we cannot delay. We have our wives and children to think of. I must get back to mine."

"Let us carry her down, Captain."

"No."

"You see, it is many lives against one: and not even that, for hers is as good as lost."

"She remains."

"And you are endangering your own life—running a terrible risk—throwing it away; for you can do no good by remaining."

"You cannot delay any longer, sirs; you must come down to the boat, at once," cries the boat-master, hurrying up.

"We do not like leaving you, Captain; but we all have our wives and children or relations."

"Yes, yes—good-bye!" said I, holding out my hand to the man nearest me.

They are gone. I am not left quite by myself. Bhola Ram is with me.

Evening falls. The gardener brings a little oil lamp. I place it in a little niche at the head of the bed. I shudder as I glance at the form extended on it: I hurry back to the door with a sense of suffocation.

At length, at length, the hukeem appears. There is nothing in the man's appearance to raise an impression against him; in fact, the other way. He is a man well dressed, of a good presence and bearing, with a grave, intellectual countenance.

After quick salutations I hurry him in.

"She has received a bullet wound."

He bends over her for a little while. He stands up.

"You will be able to do something for her?"

"Sir, nothing. From the moment she was struck she was beyond human skill. God has sent for her."

"But hear, she groans: see, she moves. She has not done that before," I say.

She had moaned and turned over on her side.

"She has lain speechless and motionless," I say.

"It is the restlessness that comes before the final quiet. The bird of the soul is about to escape from the cage of the body, and will struggle to be free."

"Oh, can you do nothing for her?"

"Nothing, except to lessen the struggle, ease the restlessness. I will bring something."

A wave of misery and desolation swept over me.

When he comes back he hands me a small packet and two small soft napkins.

"Put the powder into a basin of water and moisten her lips with it. Bathe her forehead with water. This is a grievous affliction, sir, and a loss to you, but it may be a deliverance to her from you know not what. It is the marked-out step on her onward way. All things are of God, the All-merciful, the All-knowing, to whom ever praise."

I got a wicker-work stool, and setting it by the side of the bed sat there bathing her forehead, moistening her lips. She now lay ever on her side, this side or that. As she turned over toward me, lay my way, I looked for some return of consciousness, some look of recognition: none came.

The storm broke; the lightning, the thunder, the continuous pour of rain.

"Sir," said Bhola Ram, who shared my watch, "you have now been sitting in that position for a very long time—half the night. It would be well for you to lie down and rest awhile. I will attend to the lady as I have done to you when you were ill."

"No, no," I said.

The ceaseless pouring of the rain, and with her the ceaseless turning over from side to side, which had become more

quick and rapid, a tossing from side to side. Oh, the terrible restlessness! Oh, the sad continuance, the woeful iteration, the awful, ceaseless turning over. And then comes a more awful phase, the rigidity, the loss of movement of the lower half of the body, while the upper half continues, slowly and painfully, to turn itself over. Maker of all things! an agonising sight. Then an end of that, and she lies looking upward, still and motionless. The breathing becomes more full and regular in its diminishing force: not the harsh, stertorous breathing that falls so terribly on the watcher's ear, but a full regular breathing, as that of one who lies in peaceful slumber, the full regular rise and fall of the breast of those that sleep. All signs of pain have passed away from the face. There fell upon it a deep peace. I watched it immovable. I had seen it bright and joyous, sad and pensive, thoughtful, pitiful, animated with high thought or noble sentiment, having upon it sweet maiden coyness, the bloom of love, but never had I seen it so beautiful as now. In the soft, dim morning light that now filled the room it looked ethereal: upon it a supreme heavenly loveliness, a beauty divine; the earthly mould there in all its former beauty, but now transfigured: on it the light from the throne of God. Many a time I cried "Mary, love!" "Mary, darling!" "Mary, sweet!" and she had not heard. Now with the ceasing of the struggle the vital powers gathered to consciousness, the sinking flame leapt up to momentary brightness. As I gazed with fixed eyes a sudden scintillation, a look of recognition in her eyes, upon her lips a smile of greeting: our spirits met. "Mary!" I cry. No more a look of recognition in the eyes: the smile on the lips was not for me. The things of this earth had passed away.

And yet there seemed some internal power: she seemed to have command of her breathing: as if life were not passing away from her, but she was giving it up. On her lips a soft, sweet, quivering smile, than which upon this earth nothing have I seen more beautiful. The lips vibrated with a delicate softness, than the mere mechanical play of which I had seen in nature no movement more beautiful, while the expression upon them was divine: no pain, no sorrow; joy, peace—yea, even a heavenly playfulness. She was not losing her life, but

delivering it into the hands of God, whose face she saw. With an infinitesimal delicacy and fineness of decline, like the imperceptible ceasing on the ear of a sweet strain of music, like the imperceptible fading on the eye of the soft tint on a cloud, like the fading away of a thought in a dream, the play of the lips grew less and less: but to the last was on them that peace, that joy, that divine playfulness: also a quality, a something, I have not named, I could not name, there are no words to name it, it was not of this world. The beautiful, delicate vibration has ceased. She is dead. I stand up. I bend down and kiss her forehead and close her eyes. I stagger to the wall and lean against it, and give way to my agony.

My man comes in: he has been away.

"In the name of God, how beautiful her face!" he says.

"Do not weep, sir," he says; "it is the will of God."

"I would be alone."

He goes out.

After a while he comes back. "The sun is rising. Will not the Cherisher of the Poor now perform his ablutions and eat and drink? The grief will lie in the heart, but these things have to be done."

"After a little while, Bhola Ram."

He went out. I wrestled with my grief.

"Forgiveness, sir," said he, stepping in through the doorway, "but the sun has risen; time passes. It is needful to take thought for the burial: where, how."

Like him of old I have now to seek where to bury my dead.

A feeling of horror arises within me. The elaborate systems for the disposal of the dead that have arisen in the East, the burning rather than burial, the enveloping in the long lengths of cere-cloths and the placing in sealed caskets, the laying in the hollows of rocks, in impenetrable sarcophagi, in stately secure mausoleums, in the heart of stone-hewn pyramids, have been due to the dread of wild animals which seek to drag forth the dead bodies, burrow under the earth to them, desecrate the grave, expose the loved bodies to violence and dishonour. Shall I, as the Hindoos use, build a lofty pyre by the water's edge and lay her dear body on it; a lofty pyre of fragrant woods that will do its work quickly, raise a mighty

flame? The thought is repugnant to me; I would rather lay her in the bosom of mother earth if only she might rest there undisturbed.

"Where?" I say to Bhola Ram.

"Let us go to the gardener," he says.

We go to him.

"You could dig the grave in the Sati Bāgh," says the gardener.

"Where is it?"

"Near here. I will show you from the gateway."

It was an ancient grove. In it shone the white monuments which marked the spots on which the rite from which it took its name had been performed.

"From whom must I get permission?"

"From no one. The Bāgh is no longer held sacred to its ancient use. If from anyone from me. The grove is on our land."

"Will there be no interruption from the sepoys?"

"They are gone."

"They did not seek to molest me last night?"

"They did not know you were here. Thought you had gone away in the boat. I gave that out, and kept the gate closed."

I go to it with Bhola Ram and choose the spot.

"It will be easy to get men to dig it, Bhola Ram. But how about the brick lining, the coffin?"

"Sir, no coffin is to be got here. No one could or would make one. But the brick chamber can be made. They are constructing here a new ghaut, a little way lower down. The labour and material have been collected for it. For payment they would make the grave for you, all complete."

"Fetch me the head man of the works."

The chief builder comes. He is ready to undertake the work. For how much? He names the price. That and half as much over if the work is done quickly and well.

"Quickly and well. The materials are at hand, of the best; the labour abundant. But the payment must be immediate." The promise to pay of an Englishman was not now held so sure.

"Immediate. But the grave must be ready by this evening."

"Oh yes. The earth is soft to dig after the rain. The bricks are there, the mortar ready prepared, labour superabundant."

They have soon begun the work.

I send Bhola Ram to the village, money in hand. He comes back accompanied by some women, who perform the last sad offices for the dead. They swathe her in soft silks. He has brought fresh bed linen, clean and sweet and white as driven snow. I find growing under the trees of the grove some little wild flowers like daisies; I gather a bunch of these and lay them on her breast.

When the grave is dug I watch them build the narrow receptacle. As the ghaut was to be a grand one, and was founded in running water, they are using for it that splendid cement for which India is famous, which sets like marble, and when applied as plaster to walls gives them a surface like that of marble, as seen in so many great buildings in India. When finished the little chamber showed like a hollow in a rock, in marble.

It was a day of continual, splendid sunshine.

In the afternoon I sent Bhola Ram into the village to procure all he could of fragrant preservative unguents, precious ointments, frankincense, and musk, and myrrh, and camphor, and spices, and heaped them in the casket.

In the evening we laid her down in her last resting-place, her fragrant resting-place. I repeated such sentences of the Burial Service as I could remember. "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes." "In sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life." "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

When the workmen had laid the long, single slab of stone I had ordered down on the cement which sets like stone, covered the receptacle with it, she lay in a chamber as safe and impenetrable as any granite or marble or porphyry sarcophagus of king or emperor. Above the stone we filled in the earth level with the ground, and marked the spot in the best manner possible, by cutting a cross in the sward.

CHAPTER XLIV

ADDENDUM

THEN came a period of vagueness. My life had gone out of me. The quick perception, the sharp reception of impressions, which I had deemed a leading quality of my nature, seemed obliterated. My life was lived by my faithful servant. He bid me arise and wash and dress in the morning. He examined my wound, and washed and dressed it, and said it was better or worse. He brought me food and drink at certain hours. He said it was time to sleep. She was dead; that my only thought. One day he said we must remove from where we were. He took me to a solitary hamlet in the midst of a vast stretch of low, level land above the point of junction of two rivers. The new situation somewhat arouses the faculty of observation. But there is nothing to keep it active, dull the past with the present, for the hamlet consists merely of half a dozen huts and cattle pens. Below stretches the low, green inch, above whose flat surface show some mounds and flat-topped plateaux similar to the one we are on, some of them crowned with patches of black-stemmed, crooked-boughed mimosas. The sunlight shines on it, and the darkness broods upon it. In the morning the cattle are driven down to graze on it. I wash, eat the midday meal. In the evening the cattle are driven back again. The morning and the evening were the first day, and the second, and the third.

How many days had passed I knew not, when, looking out from my rude balcony one morning, I beheld a change. Instead of the green plain, about the mound now lay a great stretch of water, above whose far-spread surface rose, here and there, the tops of some of the plateaux, or showed the crooked-boughed, black-stemmed mimosas, which seemed to be float-

ing on the water, the mounds on which they grew submerged. Our mound had become an island.

"That is why we came here," said Bhola Ram. "The inundation happens every year. That is what makes the low-land green and fit for grazing so that the cattle are brought down here. Now it is of service to us. It makes this place secure. The waters of the Lord are about us."

For many a day I watched the water take the glow of the sun as he rose or set: for many a night I watched it reflect the moonlight, the myriad points of the stars.

But the sight of the herds of cattle and buffaloes swimming off in the morning to graze on the patches and strips of land left unsubmerged, swimming back again in the evening, the herdsmen sitting or standing on their backs; the daily attention to the wants of the body, which may not be intermitted even in the face of death; the great storms, and the many falls of rain, the sudden sharp cold, and the long intervals of heat; the illnesses, the inconveniences, and the annoyances, and the sufferings; the dull vacuity and the weariness; the rumours of danger, even here; the occasional talks with the herdsmen; all this went by in a haze. The only definite memory was that of gazing out over the wide waste of waters.

Then came the change. The battle tide had turned in our favour. One day, after some months had passed, a party appeared to conduct me, in honour and safety, to that fortress in the neighbourhood of Rahun, twelve or fourteen miles below it, in which some of those who had taken part in the first exodus, or flight, had found shelter. That party consisted of three unmarried men, and one family—a married man, his wife, and three children. Of all the many families lately resident in the pleasant and favourite station of Rahun that was the one sole family that survived. The others were all swept away off the face of the earth; some at Rahun, most at Kunhiapur, to which they had got down by the river. That party of eight had received an addition in the person of a man who, like myself, had escaped from the massacre on the sandbank; now by my coming it was raised in number to ten. We six men, one woman, and three children, were the only ones that escaped destruction out of the three hundred, or so, men, women and children that had constituted the Christian com-

munity of Rahun, formed that pleasant English station. Those who had got down to Kunhiapur in the three boats in the first exodus, those who had got down to it in the boat in which my dear one had received her mortal wound, the one surviving boat of the last exodus, all had met with death, in one form more terrible than another, there.

We were sent down to that place too, with a well-found boat, and a full-flowing river, and security, a very different voyage from the others. We found the city of blood in the occupation of our relieving force under the gallant Havelock. I was attached to it, and so began the second section of my experiences of the Mutiny, in which the name of Lucknow was to have a foremost place.

* * * * * * *

I purchased the garden-house in which Mary Alexander died. I purchased fields in the village. I have established an endowment for the care and up-keep of her tomb. It will amply suffice. The first custodian is Bhola Ram, who still lives : lives in the sacred garden-house. The custodianship is to run in his family, and I hope it will continue to do so for many generations, as has been the case with many another similar post in India, to my own knowledge.

One of the conditions of the holding of the post is the placing of a light every Sunday evening on the tomb.

Over her last resting-place, amid the monuments of conjugal love strong unto death, stronger than death, now rises a large marble cross in the form of a Calvary. There every Sunday evening the little lamp twinkles at the foot of the cross. It shone there last Sunday evening. It will shine there next Sunday evening.

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